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WRITTEN IN THE RAIN

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SPORT OF GODS. "X."

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WRITTEN IN THE RAIN

BY

JOHN TREVENA

AUTHOR OF "GRANITE'

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED

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Published 1910

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE title of this volume sufficiently explains that all the tales contained therein were written in England. Half-a-dozen had a kind of premature birth in the sunshine of a distant land; they were safely delivered in the rain, they have received their final form and baptism during floods. Some of these children are fairly grown-up, most of them raised their first cry a good many years ago, two at least left the cradle as far back as 1894, so will soon be out of their 'teens; all, with one exception, have been presented to the public by the editors of such periodicals, alive or dead, as *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Temple Bar*, *MacMillan's Magazine*, *The Illustrated London News*, *Black and White*, *The Lady's Realm*, and others. The exception is the concluding item, "Matrimony," which is not a story, but an attempt to reproduce the marriage service of the mediæval church, and was written especially for this volume during the early weeks of the present year, upon days when the 12th verse of the 7th chapter of Genesis was wonderfully appropriate. The author must apologise for the unruly character of certain members of his family, and particularly for imposing upon the forbearance of his public by introducing such a frivolous trifle as "A Comet for Sale," which appeared originally as a short story.

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v

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BY VIOLENCE	1
II.	BUGS AND OTHER THINGS	32
III.	A REMINISCENCE CONCERNING A WOMAN	76
IV.	A REMINISCENCE CONCERNING A MAN	109
V.	STUDY OF A FAILURE AT HOME	139
VI.	STUDY OF A FAILURE ABROAD	153
VII.	THE FROZEN MAN	182
VIII.	DREAMS	212
IX.	A COMET FOR SALE	234
X.	FROGGIE WOULD A-WOOING GO	261
XI.	BUSINESS IS BUSINESS	278
XII.	THE CHRISTENING OF THE FIFTEEN PRINCESSES	296
XIII.	MATRIMONY	308

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

I

BY VIOLENCE

I

"Dear Sir,—
"The wooden enemies are out.
"Yours obediently,
"Oliver Vorse."

Simon Searell—Reverend or Father, if you will—read this short message as he tramped the streets of Stonehouse, which were full of fog, from the sea on one side and the river on the other. Vorse was an uneducated man; the mysticism of flowers was nothing to him, the time of spring was merely a change of season, and the most spiritual of blooms were only "wooden enemies." Searell frowned a little, not at the lack of education, which was rather a peace to be desired, but at the harshness of the words, and went on, wondering if the wood-anemones were to be his friends, or little cups of poison.

Searell climbed streets of poor houses, the unhappy windows curtained with mist, and came out by a small church made of iron, a cheap and gaudy thing, almost as squalid on the outside as the houses. He looked at it with a shudder. It

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was his no longer; he had given it up; he was going to forget those toy-like altars, the cheap brass candlesticks, the artificial flowers, and all the images. They were wooden and stone enemies to him now. He was going deeper to find the throbbing heart of religion, putting aside dolls and tapers and the sham of sentimentality. Solitude and mysticism were to be his stars through the night, and he trusted, with their aid, to reach the dawn. He turned from the church, stopped at a house, and that was squalid too, knocked, then wiped his boots, as if certain of being admitted.

"Father Damon?" he asked shortly. Searell's voice was sweet; he had helped people "home," as they called it, with his tongue, not with his soul, just as a sweet-toned organ calls for tears with the beauty of its sounds, though the instrument itself is dead.

"Yes, your reverence," the housekeeper answered, as shortly; and Searell walked up the foggy stairs murmuring to himself, "The wind-flowers are out, and I am free."

Father Damon stood in a little square room hideously papered. He was small, dark, heavy-featured, peasant-like; and Searell saw at a glance that his successor was as dull in many ways as Oliver Vorse. All that he knew had been forced upon him almost violently; he had not gone forth gathering for himself, he dared not, his mind had been tilled by careful teachers, kept under restraint, all his side-growths pruned away, in order that orthodoxy might develop in one large

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unlovely head. When the order went forth to kneel, he knelt, and when it was time to lift his eyes to Heaven, he lifted them. It was a life of prison, and he could never smell the woodland through the fugitive fog of incense.

"He doesn't know," muttered Searell. "He thinks it is daylight where he stands."

"I have come to give you information about the mission," he said aloud, and then began; but the telling took some time. How troublesome, how paltry, were the details; and Father Damon was so dull. Everything had to be repeated, explained so carefully; and was it worth the words? The successor was very earnest, but not enthusiastic, that had been crushed out of him; and Searell grew impatient at the wooden figure, with its simple face and child-like questions. He spoke faster, almost angrily, only desiring to get away and smell the earth; and his eyes wandered about the room, which was so unlovely, not bare, but filled with those things that make for the nakedness of life. There was wanting something to galvanise that sluggish Damon into passion, to destroy the machinery, turn him into a strong mad animal with dilating nostrils. One little touch would have done it. A portrait of a pretty woman upon the mantelshelf would have gone far; but there was nothing except inartistic pictures of mythical saints.

"You are retiring. You seem strong and well," said Damon, when he had obtained all the information that was required.

Searell was in a hurry to be gone, as the sleeper

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struggles to awake from a bad dream; but that voice and its stagnant repose aroused him.

"I am old, I am sixty," he said. "I am beginning again, trying to find what the Church has not shown me."

"What is that?"

"Light."

Damon looked at him with the eyes of horror, and put out his peasant-like hands as if to force away some weight that pressed against him; but he said nothing.

"I will not go away in the odour of hypocrisy. Listen," said Searell. "I am far from saying that the Church does not lead towards a kind of light; but it has not led me. And this I do say, that in the world at large all religion is a failure; and I am going to try and find mine in the solitudes."

"The truth is in the Church. It is your fault if you have missed it," said Damon, in a hollow voice, hoping that the other, for the sake of his soul, was mad.

"It is there for some, the minority. You will never realise how small that minority is. We cannot hasten the dawn with juggling. True religion is a thing of innocence, not a matter of spells and charms; and it is in the innocence of Nature that I will search for it. I believe it exists there, underneath the outward cruelty, and I shall find it among the flowers. The flower alone does not struggle with violence, it sheds no blood; the weed smothers, and the bindweed chokes; but without some fault upon the surface, perfection

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might be obtained, which cannot be. Look into the flower, and you will find a condition which is not approached by man or other animals. There is a purity which brings tears into your eyes. Eliminate violence, and you have innocence; obtain innocence, and you see the light. At the beginning of things we are told that the world was destroyed by water because the earth was filled with violence. At the beginning of the new era we learn that the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence. Will you say the Church does not rule by violence, by threats, suppressions, rubrics, and by vows?"

"I cannot understand you," said Damon.

"Will you understand when I say that the God of life is to be found among the flowers?"

The other shook his head and looked frightened. Free speech was not allowed, and, if it had been, he would not have known how to use it. He walked between rubrics, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left; and the living flower was a thing for funeral wreaths. For the altars, artificial ones were good enough, as they did not require renewing, and they looked real to the congregation, and how they were regarded elsewhere did not concern him; and whether they had been made by sweated labour did not concern him, because he was not allowed to think, and he himself was artificial, neither man nor animal, but a side-growth of supernaturalism.

"Let me go on now I have begun," said Searell. "I am leaving here, and my words will not live after me. I am a man who has tested life, who

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has been through every experience, and I have discovered that what morality calls bad is often good, and that which we call virtue sometimes springs from vice. The purest water runs upon mud, only you must not rake it up. In my youth I served as a soldier, and upon leaving the army I sought the Church, partly to find a rest, chiefly, perhaps, because my mind was mystical. But nothing was revealed, and nothing could be, for the mystic must be free; and the priest is a soul in prison, and the book of his captivity is always before him. Here he must join his hands; there he must lift his eyes to Heaven, prostrate himself, kiss the altar, until the time comes when he feels alone, cut off from the Creator of his dreams by these mechanics, horribly alone among images; and he seems to hear a voice asking sorrowfully, 'What is this rule you are following? Who told you to do this? Go out upon the hills and into the woods, for I am there.' But he cannot move, for the time has come to join his hands again, and the revelation passes unseen, because he has to keep his eyes shut. It is written so, and he must obey."

"I cannot answer you," muttered Damon; and it was true, for these words took him outside the well-worn groove and dropped him useless.

"If I found the man who could, I would follow him," came the answer, and the white-headed priest passed a hand across his eyes, as if trying to brush the fog away. "I have been longing to escape for years. The iron of the little mission-church has eaten into my soul. I ought to have

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resigned? Why so, when I performed all my duties? Without means I could not have faced the world, for the mystic is not a practical man, and these hands," he said, frowning, "they are hands to be despised, for they have done nothing. No, do not answer me, you cannot, you are bound. I am free. A year ago I was left money——"

"A curse."

"If you will, a curse to buy a pathway to my Heaven. There was a place I pined for, up on the heights of Dartmoor, a valley among mountains. I have bought it. They call it Pixyland."

"Paganism," cried the peasant-priest hoarsely, and crossed himself.

"Purity," said Searell, in his sweet voice. "Pure air, pure hills, pure loneliness. It is a place of rocks, of heather and large-rooted ferns, and it is very steep, terrace rising upon terrace to the heights. At the bottom of the valley are trees; here also is a wild path and a wild stream broken upon the rocks, and becoming whole again at the foot of a glen. For centuries the place has been haunted in men's imagination, and they have avoided it because it is a garden of—angels. I am going now to make it bloom, I am going to grasp that solitude and weave with it a mantle of light. I am going to walk on my pixy-path and watch the shadows creeping up and down my pixy-glen; and the growth will come, the growth of knowledge, and of consciousness; and there I may meet my Gardener, driven out of the world by violence, out of the Church by violence, revealing Himself, not tortured, cross-laden, and

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frowning, and not awful, but as the smiling Guardian of the flowers."

There was hardly a sound in the cold room, stiff with the antique pictures of quaint saints, dark with that dull peasant born to be ruled; and yet Searell was going out with a haunted face, passing like a phantom from the house of poverty, so from the street with its church of poverty, and the wet board with Mass notices, and the waste of ground heaped up with rubbish. There was a pear-tree leaning from the waste, a tree which the builders had forgotten, and from the tree hung a broken branch, and at the end of that branch, beneath the buds of spring, were two black leaves neglected by the winter, side by side, struggling with one another; for there was wind down the street which made them struggle; but neither dropped, and they fought on silently while the wind lasted.

"Violence even in dead things," Searell murmured; and, reaching up his hand, he quieted those two restless leaves for ever.

II

Oliver Vorse was lying among the wood-anemones, and he was drunk. He would have looked like a monster had his condition been rare; but it was common, therefore Vorse was not abnormal, only a fool. He did not know where he was, in the pixy-path upon the wind-flowers, crushing so many with his sodden carcase, while the pure

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pixy-water trickled underneath. He had come the wrong way at the turning of the path; instead of ascending to the house, which was the way of difficulty, he had stepped downwards choosing the path of ease, as men will, even when sober. The state of his body was nothing, as nobody would see him except Sibley, his wife. The master was expected to-morrow, and then he would have to pretend to be a man.

The moon was young, a cradle of silver, and the stars were wrapped in sleep-compelling clouds; and all the light that there was seemed to come from the anemones which Vorse was defiling. The little white things were lanterns, retaining light, but not giving it forth, and a stickle of water shone like a shield. There was such a wonderful purity in Nature apart from the man. Everything seemed to bear the mark of beauty and holiness except him. It was out of the world in that fairy garden hanging between the cities and the clouds, and the vices of the world were out of place; and yet there was no barrier which they could not leap across.

A light appeared thick and heavy, putting out the eyes of the flowers. It wobbled down the natural terraces, weather-hewn from granite, and with it came a voice suggesting more violence, harsh and angry, not a voice of the clouds, but of the street-corner, where faces are thin and fierce, and the paving-stones seem cruel. Sibley was searching for her husband, not because she loved him, nor requiring his company for any reason except the selfish one that the loneliness above

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frightened her, and her small spirit quailed before the heaving moorland. Any sort of a brute was better than the God of the mountains. She stumbled over an obstacle, lowered the lantern, but it was a mass of granite carved cynically by centuries of rain into the semblance of a tombstone. Again she stumbled, and now it was the trunk of a tree, phosphorescent with rottenness. A third time she stumbled, and so found her master with the rottenness of the fallen tree, without the strength of the granite.

She kicked him, struck him with the greasy lantern, and swore.

"Get up, dirty swine. Get up, will ye? Mind what the master told yew? and he'm coming in the morning."

Oliver only growled and snored. This was his form of mysticism, and it was a kind of happiness. If master had dreams, why not he? Master could dream at one end of creation, he at the other. There was plenty of time. Sibley was only twenty-four, Oliver not much older. When life is young the end of it is a myth, and passion is the god.

There was another light down the pixy-path, very steady and soft. Had it been blue it might have been a thing of the bog, looking for the body it had thrown away, but it was white, and it flickered hardly at all, for the night was smothered up and the winds were slumbering. It came up the path with a kind of gliding rather terrible and there was not a sound around it. The master was approaching in the night. Having completed the

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last duty sooner than he had anticipated, he acted on the impulse. There was time to escape, so why wait for the morning? And there would be the glamour of passing through the dark towards clouds and mistland. The preparations of a man in earnest take no time. He must put a taper in his pocket, the last relic of the church he was leaving, as the night would be heavy upon the pathway, and he must walk there and see the wood-anemones in flower and feel the peace settling upon his eyelids. There was no time to be lost, for he was old, and still a child, with everything to learn.

Sibley saw the figure, and screamed, supposing it to be a spirit doing penance for past sins with the lighted candle; while her husband heaved and called for drink.

Searell stood upon the path. The wind-flowers were out, but their heads were hanging in shame; there was no spiritual life in them, they were already dead like the two black leaves upon the pear-tree, and the destroyer of life was that heap of flesh upon them. He had come away from the world to forget its violence, and here it was upon his mystic pathway. He had come to find his God upon the flowers, and had found a drunken man instead.

He was calm, to Sibley he looked divine, as he placed the candle in the niche of a gaping boulder, and she wondered at his restraint. He was a god, for he had made her, had saved her from street life, and might still save Oliver if he could bear with him. They were not of his religion,

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they were only devil-worshippers, and yet he had stooped down and dragged them almost by violence from the rubbish-pit.

"Forgive 'en this once, master," she cried. "I'll see he don't fall again. Us didn't look vor ye till the morning, and Oliver went down, and this be how he comed back."

There was a flat rock above the pixy-water, and here Searell seated himself, saying, "Do not speak. Your voice is harsh."

For some moments the only sounds were the deep breathing of Vorse and the tinkling of the stream. The flame of the candle did not flicker, and Sibley remained as motionless, her hands clasped before her, looking down. Then Searell spoke:

"I was walking along a street, and at a dark end of it a man and woman were fighting. They were young and fierce. As I came near, the man threw the woman down and thumped her in the back. I separated them by violence. They respected my profession, and did not greatly resent my interference. So there was good in them, but, like young beasts, they had run wild, and no man had tamed them. You know of whom I am speaking?"

"Ees, master, I reckon," she whispered.

"Subsequently they expressed a wish to reform, and I entered into an agreement with them. At that time they were living together, although unmarried. I told them I should be requiring a couple to attend to me and my home, and I promised to engage them if they would be legally wedded. But conditions were imposed. One of them has been broken to-night."

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"It wun't ever happen again, master."

"I have myself to think of. There must be selfishness," said Searell. "There is no escaping from it. If one condition is broken, another may be. You remember the other?"

"Ees, master—no children."

The words sounded harsh, somehow, in that fairy place, and they seemed to agree rather with the breathing of the drunken man than with the ringing of the stream.

"Perhaps I am hard, but I have my peace of mind to consider. A child's cry, a child's mischievous ways, would destroy it. There is no room in my house for children, and this is not the place for them. I have a search to make," he murmured. "The scream of infants would lead me far astray. You will remember?"

"Us ha' no other home, master."

"You will remember?"

"Ees, master."

"I will forget what has happened to-night," said Searell, bending from the rock, dipping his hand into the pixy-water. "Let this be a time of regeneration for us all. Do you respect a ceremony?"

"Ees, master, I reckon," she said again, though she could not understand him.

"We will lead a new life," he said, with a smile which was visible in the light of candle and lantern.

Sibley stepped forward as Oliver lifted himself with heavy movements, and muttered a half-conscious "Ask your pardon, master."

Searell brought up a little of the bright water,

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and sprinkled the woman, then the man, without any other sign, and with the words in his soft mystic voice, "I receive you into the new life."

Then he picked up the taper and went, leaving the dull-witted couple afraid of him.

III

AFTER a year in Pixyland, what was there? A garden, a place of almost unearthly beauty, and through it the master moved slowly, clad no longer in the clothes of religion, nor even in the garments of respectability; his coat sack-like, its pockets bulging with bulbs and tubers, and his hair was in white ringlets, and his hands were often in the warm earth, grubbing out furze-roots. The terrestrial paradise had been attained; down the steep slopes poured a cascade of colour, the pixy-path was alight all night with white, out of the pixy-water rose golden osmundas and the ghostly spiræa; and Searell's face was also ghostly, it was hungry, and the eyes were dull. It was not the face of the priest who had built up the mission, that had been eager. It was not the face of the mystic who had walked up the path by candlelight, that had been happy. It was not the face of the spiritualist who feels he is conquering the atmosphere, nor that of a dreamer. It was the face of one who was sad.

Searell had discovered, though he would not own it to himself, that lonely happiness is impossible. What was a discovery if no friend could

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be told of it? What was the loveliness of his garden when there was no one to share it with? What would Heaven itself be if he was there alone? There must be sympathy, and without it life is lost.

Intellect was losing its edge. He almost forgot what he had come there for. Instead of ascending towards more light he was falling into grosser darkness. He did not even dream; he was sluggish, and oblivion was over him; which must happen when a man drifts from the world and cuts himself away from the hearts and brains of others. His cry was no longer the triumphant one of strength and self-confidence. It was the cry "Why hast Thou forgotten me?" as he walked heavily, and the weight of his own presence oppressed him; and then he would mutter aloud, "Come and see my garden. I must show you the flowers," though there was nobody to hear. That was all: he was a gardener; he wanted to show his flowers, shrubs, ferns, he wanted to delight some one with his bog-plants, he longed to see admiration dawning upon a human face, love for the beautiful kindling in human eyes; and so he came to crave for human life, human words and beauty, human sympathy, even human sin and shame and violence rather than the innocence and purity and gentleness of God among the flowers.

"Master, where be I to plant this?" "Master, will ye pay these bills?" Such were the almost brutal questions around him.

He had asked for solitude; and now he longed for love, earthly love.

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It was winter, when the nights were wild and the evenings intolerable; and during one of them the sound of a quarrel reached his ears. Oliver and Sibley had not been satisfactory. If they had abstained from the vices, they had not learnt to love one another; and, as Searell listened then, he saw the violent streets and that boy and girl tussle in the dirt. He went down, and at the foot of the stairs heard the woman's angry voice, "Yew ha' ruined me"; and then the growl of Oliver, "Shut your noise. Master be moving over." Through the doorway Searell saw them, like beasts half-tamed, longing to break into their natural habits, but dreading the master's whip. Were they worse than they had been? Was it the effect of solitude upon them? Sibley had no small amusements such as women desire. Oliver had no love for his home life. It seemed to Searell that indifference was settling upon them all. He advanced into the kitchen, stood between them as he had done before, looked at the man, and noticed something new, a kind of eagerness, which he tried to suppress; then at the woman, and here too was a difference, a softer face and eyes half ashamed. Perhaps, then, they did love each other, and a word from him might kindle the spark into flame.

"I interfered between you once before. It was for your good then."

"No, master," said Sibley.

"I think so," he said, startled by her independence and rudeness.

"It would ha' been better if yew had passed by and let we bide," she went on; and when Oliver

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growled his "Shut your noise," it was with less anger than usual.

"Us could ha' done what us had a mind to then," she said. "This be a prison."

"We are all in prison, if you can understand me. The walls are all round, and we cannot get over them."

"'Tis best vor volk to live as 'em be meant to," said Sibley.

And again Searell was amazed. How had this woman obtained the power and the courage to answer him? And to beat him, for he was beaten. He had no words to reply to that simple philosophy, and to the woman who appealed from his decision. He had played the God with them, had brought them out of chaos, and had given them his commandments; and he was no God, but a weak man; and they were not his children.

He went back to his books, there were no flowers except Christmas-roses and snowdrops, shivering things of winter, and tried to dream. Nothing came. It seemed to him there was less mysticism in his mistland than in the dirty streets of Stonehouse; and, while he mused, that world came knocking at his mind, calling in the dialect of Sibley, "'Tis best vor volk to live as 'em be meant to." His own body, his sluggishness and unhappiness, convicted him of error; but, if he was wrong, what of all religion which tells of a God of mysticism, and of his own in particular, which, at that very season of the year, rejoiced at the birth of a Child-creator by mysticism not through Love? And at his mind was hot, red-blooded passion, a crude

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and awful thing, love for those things which make men horrible, love for the dirt and the roots, not for bud and bloom; and a contempt and hatred for cold morality and the spells muttered by candle-light; and the message of the flowers was this: "Through the agency of others, through the eyes of those who are loved and loving, not by the confinement of self, souls find the dawn."

"Mrs. Vorse," said Searell one day, the yellow aconites were out, the first colour of the year, and he was going to look at them, "you have changed."

Sibley had her back towards him, engaged in cleaning, and she was wearing, as she always did, the enveloping apron of the country, which hung from her shoulders and surrounded her body like a sack. He could not see the flush upon her face.

"Your voice is softer. You sing at your work. You seem happy."

"I bain't, master," she whispered. "I feels, master, I wants to be happy, but I be frightened."

"Of the loneliness?"

"Not that, master. I can't tell ye, but I be frightened."

"You and your husband get along better. You are quieter. I have not heard you quarrel for some time."

"There be gude in Oliver," she said.

"I thought so," he murmured. "But I have not been able to bring it out."

He went to see the aconites, but they were cold, and made him shiver. It was warm innocence he wanted, not the purity which numbed; and, down

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below, the slopes were naked, the path rustled with dead oak-leaves, and the pixy-water was in flood. The violence of the world was there, and nothing could drive it out.

"Is your wife well, Oliver?" he asked. "I heard a sound in your room early this morning. It seemed to me she was ill."

Vorse was uprooting bracken, which is hard labour, and he made no pause when his master spoke.

"I ha' never knowed she better," he answered.

"She frets less. There is a womanliness about her now which is pleasant. You, also, have very much improved. You speak to her gently. You do not drink now?"

"Her made me give it up."

"Had I nothing to do with it?"

"No, master," said Oliver bluntly. "I couldn't ha' given it up vor yew. I did try, but I couldn't, I promised to give it up vor Sibley."

"When?"

"Months ago. Her told me something, and 'twur then I promised to give it up vor ever."

"What did she tell you?"

"Her had received a message from God."

These were strange words from the mouth of Oliver Vorse.

"Her took 'em from yew, master," he added apologetically.

Searell moved aside, gazing at the black snake-like fern-roots. Then he lifted up his eyes in something like torment. His creatures finding in the garden what he had missed, taking his God away

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from him! the dull Sibley his superior, reaping the harvest that he had sown! the dull Oliver reforming for her, and not for him! And he had nothing, he was alone, as much alone in his garden as in the mission-church, obeying the printed rubrics and hearing the call, "Who told you to do this? Go out and find Me, for I am in the solitudes."

"You are educating yourselves," he suggested, turning back. "You and Sibley are improving your minds by learning. I have done that much for you."

Oliver said nothing, his head was down, and his hands grubbed at the great roots. There was no answer to make.

It was evening, the time of restlessness, and Searell came downstairs; his study was above, and he came down only to change his rooms, to get into another atmosphere, that he might find rest for his mind. The kitchen door was open. Oliver was seated in a low chair, and Sibley was upon his knees, her arms round his neck, her head upon his shoulder. Both were motionless as if asleep.

Searell went away. This time he could not interfere, and the noise of the wind became to him the cry of the wild world. "Men must be violent," it cried. "Men were made for passion," it cried; "and with the strength of the body, rather than by the gropings of the mind, they shall clear the mists from their eyes, and by means of the act of creation find Creator."

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IV

A PERFECT evening is often the prelude to a stormy night. It was such an evening in spring again, when the wind-flowers were out, and an old man riding off the moor paused beside Searell's boundary-wall to prophesy a tempest. This was a white old man with queer blue eyes, and he too was a mystic under the spell of solitude; but, unlike Searell, he had his ties, without which no man can be happy. By day he roamed, and at evening, by the fireside, told the children small and great his own weird tales of Dartmoor. There were no restless evenings for him. Searell shook his head almost angrily. He lived upon the face of the moor, wrapped himself in its secrets, yet he could not foretell its weather. The passing cloud had no message, the river with its changing cry told him nothing. He went into the house.

"Where is your wife?" he said to Oliver.

"Her bain't well, master." The man was nervous, and his eyes were large.

"Who is that woman in the kitchen?"

"I had to get she up to du the cooking."

"You have neglected your work to-day."

"I be cruel sorry, master."

"What is the matter with your wife? Yesterday I heard her singing."

"Nothing serious, master"; but the man was listening all the time, as if dreading to hear a call, a cry of pain, or the voice of some new strange life coming off the moor.

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The old man was right. So soon as night began, the Dartmoor tempest broke; there was no rain, nor thunder, but a dry and mighty wind which made the rocks shake; and through the storm came a weird light defying the wind to blow it out, that light which does not enter the lowlands, but lives upon mountains; and Searell stood at his high reading-desk, and sought out legends of the wind.

If there were sounds in the house he could not hear them. Deep in mysticism, he read on of the winged clouds which brought the tempests, and of their symbols, the rock-shattering worm, the stone of wisdom which tears open the secrets of life, the rosy flower which restores the dead, the house-breaking hand of glory; and the eagle symbol of lightning, and the rushing raven returning to Odin. And he read of the voices in the wind, while boulders were grinding along the river-bed; of Hulda in the forest singing for baby-souls; of the Elf maidens alluring youths astray; of Thoth staggering into oblivion with brave men's spirits; of Hermes with his winged talaria, playing the lyre and shutting fast all the myriad eyes of the stars. And something more he read about the storm-wind. It was not always taking away, it was giving; it was a bringer of new life, coming in spring as a young god with golden hair, breaking the spell of winter, bringing a magic pipe to make folk dance.

"At one time it lulls into a mystic sleep, at another it restores to new life," said Searell, speaking loudly and strongly, partly to reassure himself, because the tumult was frightening. "What is this

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wind bringing to me, more of the mystic sleep, or the new life ? "

He paced up and down the room, which shook as if with earthquake ; and hidden from him by a partition of lath and plaster was the staring horror of a dream, one small lamp, turned down, giving the half-light which suggests terror more than darkness, and on the bed a woman moaning, and against the wall a weak man groaning. Let them rave and scream, no sound of theirs could have pierced that lath and plaster, for the god of violence was fighting on their side.

" There be only one way."

That was how Oliver had been muttering the last hour.

" No, no," she sobbed.

" What can us du ? Master be hard, he bides by his word. He ha' been gude to we in all else, but this be our ruin."

" No, no." She could not hear him, but she knew what he was saying.

" Back on them streets again. No home to cover we, no food. Us ha' lived easy tu long to stand it. 'Twould end in the river. Better to lose the one than our two selves."

" No, no," her lips made the words, but not the sounds.

" 'Tis only a matter o' two minutes," he cried fiercely. " Then us be free again." He left the wall, crossed to the bed, bent down, cried into her ear, " It be awful outside. The watter be vair roaring down under. Us mun live, woman."

Sibley lifted herself with a face of death, and

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screamed as if it had been the last effort of her life, screamed again and again; but what was that in the wind? Not even a whisper; while Searell read on of the Sons of Kalew, and the miracle of their harps which changed winter into summer and death into life.

Oliver Vorse was staggering downstairs weeping; and outside the wind caught him, dragged him hither and thither like a straw, stuffing his mouth with vapour, and flung him against bellowing walls and into shrieking bushes; and still he protected what he held by instinct, and when he fell upon the steep descent he let his body be bruised and his face torn by that same instinct which makes the timid beast a savage thing.

It took no time. . . . He was back in the ghastly lamplight, staring at a ghastly face which was the reflection of his own; and the master was still in his musings, and knew nothing.

"Let me die, I'd sooner," Sibley muttered simply; but Oliver could not hear. He was leaning against the wall again; then he went on his knees, and then he turned his back upon the bed. That face, the black hair, a blood-stain visible, they frightened him. He passed into a kind of agony; he was so cold and his body was dry, and there was a lightness in his limbs.

"The watter wur roaring—roaring. There warn't no wind, not there. It wur lew down under, and them little white flowers scarce shook."

He turned his head and saw those staring eyes.

"Bain't what yew thinks," he howled. "There wur moss, plenty on't. I made a bed beside the

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rocks. It bain't cold, not very; but the watter be rising—rising—rising."

So was the tempest. It would be nearing its end, and would drop as suddenly as it had arisen; and Searell was smiling as he read of the beasts of the forest weeping as they listened to the song-wind of Gunadhya.

"I can't go out. Might see it crawling up-along, trying to come back, little white thing in the dark."

Oliver could see Sibley was speaking, making with her agonised mouth the shape of the words, "Go out." He could not, dared not, had not even the courage to open the door and look down the dimly lighted horror of the stairs. They were in the last stage of weakness, the one morally, the other physically; and the almighty strength of the wind gave them nothing except the security of its tumult.

"It'll be over," he shuddered. "The watter wur coming up all white. I couldn't bide there—there wur drops o' summat on my face, and 'twur so helpless, and it looked up. Blue, warn't 'em blue, woman?"

Sibley could not have heard, but, with all those instincts quivering, she recognised the word upon his lips and tried to nod.

"Innocent. Hadn't done nought. Would ha' kep we gude, made we man and wife. I'll go down. I'd go down if I dared—the little chin wur agin my cheek. I'll never face the dark. I'd see it move, and the little drowning bubbles on the watter. Be it over now?"

He glared at Sibley as if she could answer; and she stared back, asking, pleading, imploring him to

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play the man and face the night again; but he grovelled against the wall and shuddered, damp with an awful sweat; and the weird light upon the mountain-tops went out, because other clouds were coming up, having travelled far since evening, and the darkness became real as the roarings of the dry wind decreased. It was getting on towards midnight, and those mighty winds were tired.

"Go!" came a sudden scream; and Searell heard the echo of it and started. The cry seemed to have its origin in the storm. He closed his book, listened, heard nothing more except the coherent bellowing, and then he answered, "I will." Certainly the word had sounded, and as certainly he was alone. The Vorses would have been asleep for hours.

"I will walk along the path. It is sheltered down there," he murmured. "This may be the night appointed, the time of revelation, the time of young life. This is the mad music of the spring, the shattering of the chains of winter. The growth follows. It is the birth-night."

He wrapped a coat around him and went. During those few minutes the wind had much decreased; in another hour it would be calm and clear; and then the awful stillness of the sunrise and the perpetual wonder of the daylight.

There was again a kind of light, for the raven-clouds had gone by and the swan-clouds were crossing; and the wind was now the magic piper who drives away care, and with his merry music sets Nature capering. Searell was on the pixy-path and the wind-flowers were jigging; it was

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ghostly, but a dance, not a solemn marching as in autumn, when the leaves fall processionally downwards. It was recessional spring, when the leaves awoke, as it were, from their moon-loved sleep, preserved in unfading youth and beauty by that sleep, and leapt back at the piper's music to the branches, kissing their ancient oaks with the fervour of young love. Every flower had a moist eye and a sweet heart; and the pixy-water rang for festival.

One turn Searell made, seeing nothing, because his eyes struggled with the mist; another, and he stopped. There was a wonder, a miracle, a revelation among his wind-flowers, upon the edge of the rising water, a sleeping silent wonder which made him thrill.

"It has no bodily existence. When I come back it will be gone."

It was still there, and now the water was almost level with the bed of moss, and some of the flowers were struggling to keep their pale heads above; and it was silent, this child of the morning, lying upon its back in the moss, numbed, perhaps, though the night was not cold, and there was a beauty upon the small face, not the beauty which makes for violence, but that which gives peace, the beauty of innocence; and there was also upon it that perfect weakness, and the submission of weakness which is one of the strongest things created. And it seemed to be growing there like the wind-flowers, as fragile, but as hardy, and among them; for white anemones had been blown across each eye and across the mouth, and they

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gleamed from each ear, and the chin was another edged with pink, and all of them seemed to be jealous of the child.

"And it comes into the world by violence," Searell murmured.

Even then he hardly knew what had happened. He could not think, for his mind was full of the wonder, and commonplace ideas would not enter. He picked up the child reverently; there was no motion, no sound, no opening of blue eyes; had there been a shrill scream, the spell might have been broken—the contact was dreadful to him. He was tending a sacred mystery, elevating a sacrament newly consecrated, something which a few hours ago had been leaping like a spark in the place of his dreams, and had been flung as lightning upon his path to strike his heart open. Here was the answer of the flowers. To men the Creator was as a child, for the child is the only thing all-powerful and the only thing all-pure.

About the house Searell seemed to hear the sound of a groaning like the moan of the dying wind, and there were movements once or twice as of a wounded body.

A dusty prie-dieu stood in the corner of the study. This he placed near the fire, a cushion upon it, and then the child; and lighted a candle upon each side. He stood with his arms folded, the Omega of life worshipping the Alpha of it, until all things seemed to be new and strange, as upon a resurrection morning, and he awoke from the sleep of death and felt the spring. The winter was over and past, the time of the opening of

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flowers had come, and the voice of creation stirred upon the garden; and the change had been wrought by violence.

It was necessary to speak and find sympathy. He hated the solitude because no one shared it with him; he had grown to hate the wonderful garden because there was no one to wonder at it with him; he hated himself because no one cared for him. "Oliver!" he called, breaking the horrible quietness, forgetful of the time. "Sibley!"

Movements followed, again like wounded bodies, and Searell remembered that the woman was ill and he had done nothing for her. He went to the door; it opened, and Vorse was cowering against the wall, his hand upon his eyes. Searell hardly noticed the horrid smoking of the lamplight, the eyes upon that bed, the guilty, frightened man. Still full of himself, he cried:

"Come and see what I have found."

"I couldn't du it, master," moaned Oliver. "I took it down, but the eyes opened. 'Don't ye hurt me,' it said. 'I be just come. Bain't time vor me to go.'"

Still Searell would not understand.

"Come," he said impatiently. "She was upon my path, among my flowers."

Then life stirred again upon the bed, and Sibley drew herself up with ravenous eyes and muttered:

"Alive—alive!"

Soon the room was like a chapel. The smoky lamp had been extinguished, the prie-dieu stood beside the bed, the candles cast a warm, soft light;

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and outside upon the moor was peace. Even the merry piper had become weary and had put all things to sleep till daybreak; while Oliver Vorse upon his knees confessed the sin which had been forced upon him.

"Us dared not keep she. Sibley dared, but not me. If a child wur born, us must go, yew said. I couldn't face it, but her would ha' faced it. Us be ready to go now," he said boldly. "I ha' these hands. I'll fight. I ha' the maiden to fight vor."

"Her lives. Her moves on my bosom," cried Sibley. "Look ye, master, her eyes be open. Look at 'em, master. Did ye ever see the like?"

"What made you kinder, Sibley, more attentive to me, soft and tender?"

"'Twur the child coming, master."

"What made you sober, Oliver, fond of your wife? What was it stopped the quarrelling?"

"I minded the little child, master."

There was something tender in their illiterate speech.

"You cast her away. The sin is mine, so is the atonement. And she is mine."

"She'm mine, master," murmured Sibley.

"I found her among my flowers, the reward of my searching. She is the answer," he said. "Let her be to you the daughter of love, and to me the daughter of violence. Oliver," he cried, turning, "bring up water from the pixy-stream. As the sun rises I will baptise—my child."

"Yew'm fond o' she, master?"

"She is mine," he said, with the old impatience.

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"And we, master?"

"I am old and you are young," said Searell. "But we are all beginning life, we know nothing. We will try to find another and a better pathway."

He went back to his rooms to rest, but not to sleep, for there was something burning inside him like a coal from the altar; and suddenly a new light crept upon the moor, giving it form, changing it from black to purple. It was the dawn.

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II

BUGS AND OTHER THINGS

CHAPTER I

SAM'L EXPLAINS

THIS was the third night of storm-rain; wind also, smelling of pine-trees, beating smoke along before the ship, fogging what prospect there might have been. Water and cloud were not to be parted by the eye, and the rain joined heaven and earth together. Two damp figures stood upon deck, one of them leaning forward at the prow; the other, small and lone beside the funnel, watching sparks fly upward, peering into the mists, until he too caught sight of a wild light leaping in the darkness; both silent for a time. Then the large figure lifted its head to squirt tobacco-juice into the wind, and to bawl, "Easy there! Keep your course."

A little gong tinkled twice, and the throbbing ceased; smoke swirled about like the whirling white robes of a dancer, while heavy waves slapped the ship bitterly. The large figure of authority rolled away to swear, while the lone passenger shook himself, and said to the warm funnel, "Man warn't made for water. God and me luck being

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favourable, I'd rather see Araret than all the rain in creation."

He shuffled across deck to where the mate had spread himself across the wheel and the captain's face was glowing red by lantern light. The tongues of both were hot with argument.

"'Tis one o' the two," came the shout: "the chart's gone wrong, or that signal-fire's been lit upon the rocks south o' the harbour, or the coast's been and shifted——"

"That's three," muttered the mate, who had a weakness for accuracy where his superior was concerned.

"One o' the three, then," the captain shouted. "I'm going to lie outside till morning. If that fire ain't meant to run us on the rocks, call me a politician."

"Might draw in a bit nearer," the mate suggested, fingering the wire beside him.

"Not another yard. Me losing my reputation, not to say the ship and my life. What's the use of a good character when you're dead? Put her a piece farther from the coast, my lad. I smell rocks."

The mate tugged at the wire and, when the throbbing began again, spun the wheel round. The ship drew away from the distant light, moving slowly because she felt the pull of the tide-water. The passenger shuffled forward, and the others looked at him suspiciously, the mate hanging over the wheel, the captain crushing his chart.

"I'm Sam'l," said the passenger.

"We've heard that before," said the captain.

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"Means he ain't Jonah," explained the mate.

"I ha' been all my life a great reader o' Solomon," the passenger went on. "He left children, mebbe he left a lot o' children, for Solomon was a married man. Mebbe I'm descended from one o' them."

"Means he knows a lot," the mate interpreted.

"If you're a prophet, perhaps you'll tell us what's gone wrong on the coast yonder," shouted the captain.

"I'm feeling my way in that direction. When the world was created, cap'n——"

"I ain't agoing to listen to the history of the world," broke in the captain.

"'Twould pass the night away," the mate suggested.

"Mud was made," went on Sam'l. "The first week was fine; on the second, mebbe it rained, and the mud came. Who made the mud, God or the rain?"

"I reckon you'd best get to your bunk and rest your head," said the captain crossly. "What's creation got to do wi' a fool-fire on the rocks?"

"'Tis a result," said Sam'l. "I wouldn't say the world was created to allow a man to light fool-fires; but I argue that, if the world hadn't been created, yonder fire wouldn't ever ha' been lit. Man was created, gentlemen, in fine weather; woman was made in the night, I wouldn't have ye forget that the Almighty was a bit ashamed o' bringing her into the world, so He made her in the dark, and then the rain came. Mud, I reckon, was an unforeseen circumstance, but it stuck to the human race because the first woman would go

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and paddle about in it, liking to feel the stuff squeezing between her toes. The result o' that little game was that the child got some o' the mud too."

"If you've got anything to tell about folks at the harbour, let's have it," said the captain.

"He's coming to it gradual," said the mate reproachfully.

"He's no nearer than the first chapter of Genesis and the first verse."

"We've got our world," said Sam'l quietly. "We've got our men and women, and we've got our mud. A wise man can do a lot wi' that. I don't want to detain ye here while I give all the points regarding mud, but I'd have ye know there's no getting away from it. Some go into it like eels, some only sink to their knees, some can walk on it like solid ground; but 'tis everywhere, and the foulest mud of all, I reckon, is in the man what kills a woman."

"I follow you," said the captain.

"It don't matter if she has thrown a bit at him. We've all got the stuff, and times 'tis hard to keep it to ourselves. Plenty o' women in the world want killing; but God should do it. A man who takes a woman, takes her young and foolish, goes mad over her, chokes her, buries her in an old ant-heap —runs."

"He'd wreck a ship," the captain shouted.

"I knew he'd come to it," said the mate.

"That fire was lit for me," said Sam'l. "There's a man lying beside it, watching this ship, he'd sing a hymn if he saw me drowned, a young man

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wi' an awful way of smiling at women. Say, cap'n, did ye ever have a daughter ? "

" No, Sam'l. Mine chew."

" I've got two," said the mate. " They ain't high enough to get into trouble."

" A woman don't have to get into trouble. She's born wi' it in her."

" The fire ain't so bright," cried the captain.

" He's weakening. He knows God and my gun are agin him. He knows I'm going to blow his blasted brains out," said Sam'l.

CHAPTER II

SAM'L ARRIVES

THE storekeeper sat upon the shore, sheltered by wind-breaking pines, where the wan light waved between water and rocks. He, too, was lonesome. On one side frogs were singing, and behind, among the trees, was a voice, clear and pretty, making music out of the old troubles of mankind, approaching the grave man, telling him of the joy and folly and heat of life, out of a knowledge which was ignorance.

" I went to the store, and you were not there. What are you doing here, old man ? "

" Listening to the frogs, my gal."

" You might listen to a better song than that. If you put your ear to the ground you could hear the whole world rumbling and shifting. The

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niggers tell me they can hear the Great Spirit walking to and fro," said she.

"The rumble o' the earth," muttered the storekeeper, "the whistle o' the wind in the pines, the buzz o' the insects, the water humming in the caves. I can hear more than that: the racket o' men and women in a hurry, never happy, always spending, blood and money, I can hear 'em shouting round the corners, and the things they move in buzzing and thundering. Nights I seem to hear 'em whizzing round like wheels, and when the moon's yellow like gas I can sit out here and thank God for trees and big water, and a bit o' land that's fixed. You ain't been down there. But I have."

The girl was awed. She came nearer to the morose man; but his face was a riddle, and his eyes stared into the strong-scented gloom.

"The moon is red to-night, old man."

"Don't call me old man. I ain't old," he said sharply.

"Are you coming?" she asked indifferently. "I want some tea and sugar."

The storekeeper produced a long key, and held it out.

"Help yourself, and hang the key under the window. I'll guess what you've taken."

"Some one is coming. It is getting late, and the ship comes in to-night."

"Thankye for your singing, little gal."

"You told me you were listening to the frogs."

The storekeeper turned, took her brown hand, lifted the little fingers, lowered his head until

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his face almost touched them; but, as his hold grew firmer, the girl released herself.

"You were going to kiss my hand!" she cried passionately. "You, an old man! If you had, I would have thrown the key in your face."

"'Tis a pity," he muttered, as she went. "'Tis ill to be forty."

He heard the girl's laughter among the pines, and a gruff voice answering, "Get along home, maid, and watch the fire."

Then her father, the gambler, stumbled out of the twilight, and flung himself down like a loaded sack at the storekeeper's side.

"Gimme your pipe," he said.

"Rain and wind beyond," said the morose man, nodding seawards.

"Aye, a clear day makes a wild night. Gimme your tobacco-bag."

"How are you going at the Corner?"

"Bad," muttered the gambler. "Broke a new piece of ground to-day, and found it lousy."

"Terrible country for bugs."

"Crawling with 'em. Gimme a match."

There was a silence, only disturbed by the puffing of strong smoke and the whispering from the lonely country behind. The gloom deepened, and made a wall upon three sides; the fourth was water, heaving and sullen. Far ahead, a haze rolled onward. The waves broke listlessly; both men watched the ghostly surf spread in lace-work upon the shingle, and in a moment snatched away.

"Bad," muttered the gambler again. "Times ain't been so easy since Providence dealt us the Jack.

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The teapot ain't kept full like it used to be. He was round on the other side o' the trees as I came along."

"I've a mind to put my hands on him," said the storekeeper.

"He won't take my little queen far. 'Tis the rule o' the game for the queen to beat the Jack. She don't put her hand down if the pot ain't worth it—a long white worm, a city snipe, a mean little muck-rake. It ain't worth playing for."

"There's no holding a maid if she will," said the storekeeper hoarsely.

"There's a special providence for young women and drunkards. They ain't allowed to fall so as to hurt themselves."

"Watch the haze yonder. Is it wind, think ye?" exclaimed the storekeeper, throwing off his glumness.

"It ain't wind."

"I seem to hear the sigh of it." The storekeeper put his head down, and scraped a little light from a match. When the wooden splinter caught, he saw his clothes, his hands, and the mound on which he sat spotted with red dots. A stream of the same descended upon them like red rain, increasing steadily, filling the air, and making it hard to breathe.

"Flying ants!" he exclaimed, as the flame touched his finger-tips.

"Plague of Egypt!" shouted the gambler, spitting insects from his mouth and wringing his beard, which was full of them. He stumbled upright, blundered away coughing and cursing, striking against the pines, slapping his neck. A

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blast of cold wind leapt upon the shore, driving the inundation landwards.

The storekeeper swept the insects from his clothes, the light of the moon darted through, and the waters spread out sparkling. He went forward, away from the mounds of pine-needles, his feet rattling upon egg-shaped stones, and made for the rocks, muttering, " 'Tis time for the signal-fire."

Standing upon a rugged platform, he bent his hands about his eyes and gazed across the waters. The waves thundered, until there came one which flung its surf high up into the pines, drenching the watcher. He gasped, ran onward, slipping upon the shingle, and reached a sloping beach, sleeping in a new-world freshness. Many a black and twisted shape, terrible by moonlight, heaved along the sand, part buried: petrified trees, wrenched trunk and roots from some distant bed in the long ago, and, after years of storm-tossing, cast up to sprawl for another age upon the sand, suggesting those mighty reptiles which have passed out of the world for ever. Here a kind of pier grew out of the water, not far from the mouth of a small stream known as Woman River. The logs were clumsily put together, good work being wasted, because, each spring, ice crushed down and wrecked the structure, which had to be repaired for the credit of the harbour when the water was clear. To the last log was fixed a crosspiece, and here a lantern danced in the wind. Behind the pier, half-way up the beach, a heap of dry wood marked the position of the signal-fire. The silent man mounted the stage, lighted the lantern, and made towards the store.

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Not unobserved. The girl crossing Woman River saw him and paddled faster, to escape from the man who never smiled. She was frightened also, for a pretty trinket gleamed about her neck, and her conscience troubled her. Temptation had been too much when alone in the store, and she had stolen the bauble. She watched him walk away, so black in the moonlight, the old man of forty, with the heavy step and drooping shoulders; plunged her paddle into the water, once, twice, then stayed. Another figure, not so dark, and it avoided the first, dodging into the red willows. This one had seen her. He was the Perfect Creature.

The girl put one against the other: the storekeeper tanned and lined, rough in manner, coarse in speech; the Perfect Creature, with the slim white body and fair face. There was cruelty in the comparison, but she did not know that, for there was still more of folly. He signalled her, and she laughed, paddled up stream faster, then shot to land.

"Stand there," she called. "I will send the canoe to you."

Fixing the paddle to act as a rudder, she aimed the prow of the canoe at him like a gun; then, leaning back, settled her feet into the silt and lunged forward, driving the shell of bark away. It glided across the water like a feather blown by the wind.

"It will come to you. The swing of the stream carries it round that point. But you must not fail to catch it as it passes."

No error of judgment there, for this was a matter of skill, and had nothing to do with the heart. The

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canoe drifted up, swept round, and he put out his hand and drew it upon the sand.

"Wasn't it well done?" she called. "Ah, you should have pushed away as you put weight upon it. Now you are fixed upon the silt."

How clumsy he was, leaning upon the paddle until it bent, while she watched without a smile, and how magnificent in his clumsiness. The storekeeper would never have blundered so, and yet he would have seemed to her an object of derision, had he been there, managing the canoe never so wisely.

"I go to light the fire. The ship is due to-night," said the girl, when he had crossed. "They gave me charge of the signal-fire when I was a child. I have never failed. They know I won't."

"I will meet you on the beach," said the Perfect Creature.

"Come with me. Nobody will see us." Why did she say that? "None of the niggers dare come down in the night. They are afraid of spirits. The old storekeeper lights the lantern when it gets dark, and then I make the fire. It is lonely on the beach."

He left her abruptly, with an air of business; and she was angry, lonely, wanting him none the less, and ready to forget the slight because of that fair skin and smile. She hurried on, glad even to hear the twigs snapping where he walked.

Soon a boat crawled carefully round the reefs, reached the pier, and the Perfect Creature climbed out; the tide was falling, and the lank weeds fell flat and slimy from the logs. He turned the boat over, sent it seawards with his foot, flung his hat upon the waters, laughed at the simplicity of it all.

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Wind was rising, the moonlight failed, and cold raindrops began to sting. The girl was not there: she had run to shelter.

He demolished the lantern with one blow of a stick, descended, and ran up the beach to the fire, kicked it to pieces, rescued a few brands which he built upon the high rocks to the south of the natural harbour. No one could see him. There was an abundance of wood piled in readiness; he carried away many armfuls, nursed the flame, the wood was very dry, and the wind did the rest. Half a dozen flames danced there like scarlet Satans. He liked them well, greeted them, then turned his face inland, looking for the girl.

She came, her hair blown about, her cheeks beautiful with wind, speed, terror, and passion, torn this way and that, between duty and desire, liking them both, but the last the most. She saw the man, so perfect and young, wreathed by the smoke of the sinister fire; and he seized her firmly.

"Don't call. They may hear. Stay with me. We will keep the fire burning together."

"The ship steers for it," she gasped. "See how dark the night is now. The lantern has gone out; the ship will run upon the rocks; the captain, sailors, good men, they trust me."

"You must help me to escape. You shall come away with me—we will go into the world. You will forget."

"I shall see them on their backs, up and down in the water, with ghastly faces."

"I love you, your beautiful hair, your neck,

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mouth, lips—eh, they're sweet. Kiss me back as my wife."

"Oh, I shall faint. The captain and his men——"

"Kiss me again—again. Never mind death. It is in self-defence. My death, or his upon the ship. I love you. If I die——"

"No, no. I would let them all go. Your mouth is so good, it is love. It is living. I want to be a wife and feel this always—it goes through me. Hold me."

"It is justice, and you are mine and must save me. The fire is burning down."

"More wood—more wood."

And the ruddy glow of the fire swathed them both with a bloody mantle.

In the living-room behind the store the gambler lushed himself with tea, then, with a few comrades waiting for the ship, began to play.

The storekeeper went out, and dragged himself over the wet rocks. It seemed to him that the glow of the fire was stronger than usual; it was a thick night, and the girl had piled on the fuel. He longed to join her, dared not.

He missed his boat. Wiping the rain from his eyebrows, he looked into the creeks, but saw nothing. Suspicious, he turned away, hurried to the river, paddled across, shivering at the blackness and silence of the water, entered the pine-wood, and soon had to stop and lower himself among the willows, hearing voices frightened and defiant.

"She will not come in. Once before, on a thick night, they stayed out till daybreak."

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"We must get away."

"Where can we go? When they find out about the fire——"

"Into the burnt forest. Get me some food, as much as you can."

"I did it for love of you. Stay with me."

"It is life or death now. Love later."

"You will be brave."

"You devil!" a hoarse voice shouted.

"Go!" screamed the girl.

The storekeeper sprang out, lithe as a boy now, and struck the wrecker upon the neck, driving him headlong. Almost the same moment, sparks darted out of blackness before his eyes, made by the back of a small brown hand; and presently he bent, picked the girl up gently, while the Perfect Creature flickered into the night like a squeaking bat.

Cold light was fighting with the clouds when the storekeeper came back wet and wan, without a word to throw at any one. Soon the party left the store. The mist was full of moisture, little light clouds coursed the night away, and orange-coloured vapour in the east gave promise of day.

"When a man's abed, he don't know how well fixed he is," the gambler muttered, as his feet slipped upon the sodden grass.

Leaden waves were rolling in strongly, tossing a long black object. The storekeeper recognised his boat, but said nothing.

"No wonder she lay outside. The lantern's gone," shouted the gambler; and still the headman did not speak.

The gambler lurched forward and snatched a

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hat out of the surf. He shook it like a vicious terrier and held it out.

"One for his nob. He's pegged out. The Jack's gone, and nobody is a loser."

The ship swung round and sidled to the pier. A little man clambered out, crouched, looking every way.

"I'm Sam'l," he said. "I take after Solomon. I'm looking for a pretty young man what women call perfect."

While the words were in his mouth, the girl appeared, running down the beach.

"Gone," she cried. "Gone into the burnt forest alone."

"My dear, I expected you," said the passenger stepping forward. "I'm Sam'l. He won't marry you, and that's the end on't. The usefulness of a young woman is that she generally tells the truth when she don't mean to. Gone into the burnt forest. I'll take a walk in the same direction."

"If you track him, I shall track you," she cried fiercely. "I will warn him you are following. If I have a chance, I will kill you."

"If me and you were civilised nations, we might call that an ultimatum," said Sam'l. "My dear, I carry a heart about wi' me. I don't shoot to pass the time away. When a man says he loves you, cut him open, my gal. Look at his innards."

"The man's drownded," cried the gambler. "Look at the boat yonder, wrong side up; and here's his hat."

"No, sir," said Sam'l. "Water don't sink a wind-bladder. A man what's born to be hanged

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ain't going to be drowned, let the world be covered wi' floods and Noahs, and two of each kind in arks. I guess I'll stroll."

"You shall not follow him," screamed the girl.

"I like a picture," said Sam'l. "But 'tis surprising how soon you gets tired."

CHAPTER III

SAM'L GOES ON TALKING

CONTEMPTIBLE insects had the burnt forest to themselves; glorious man did not interfere with them there. It was a region of seamed rocks and mysterious watercourses coated with slime like wet cotton; there was little undergrowth. Skeletons of trees, charred and blackened poles, stumbled everywhere, reeling at every angle, leaning upon grotesque shapes of rock with stumps of dead limbs, or staggering upright, their branches of charcoal locked together: a place of dry wood, and, below, a tangle of dead roots writhing and spreading, given movement when the wind rattled through; fearful to the eye, a cemetery of vegetation. A crop of bleached sword-grass here and there: no other life, except deer browsing on the moss, sooty birds a few, frogs joyful in the dark, where water went; and beneath, invisible, the millions, the paltry myriads, of those that crawled.

Beside one of the rivers, silent also as if dead, the girl sat with her sins. Upon one day a thief, wrecker, traitor to her people; trusted with the

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key of the store, trusted with the signal-fire, false everywhere, and all to be true to one who was falser still. But he was perfect, and those other men were old and ugly, their skins like hides, solemn and dry-tongued. He had crossed earlier, on a dead log or two, but she could not follow; it was getting too dark, the dead forest made a tempest of twilight, and the small fool had no food. That pretty brown face and slim neck wanted nourishment, not kisses and pinches, but solid pieces of bread with meat between. She drank of the river which tasted of various orders of reptiles, and scanned the black prospect, hoping to see a flash of friendly fire. He would know she was following according to her promise, and surely he would signal. Loving her so much more than himself, after the manner of these divinities, he would want her near.

She started with a cry of fear. A voice had spoken: none she had been accustomed to hear, an enemy, an old man, that terror, a thin one, frowning and knowing nothing of the sweeter passion.

"Here's Sam'l. He's got a proverb or two and a few points to make. The faculty o' reason, that's the chief thing. A woman gets it when she's married and has a sucker. But reason never was created for the use o' gals."

The girl settled down again and said nothing, except with her eyes. She was tired out and hungry; frightened also at the threat of night and solitude.

"I'll make the points," said Sam'l. "If you

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had been a married woman, you would ha' given me the lead if I'd been following your husband. You would ha' argued, 'Sam'l is the one to watch.' That would ha' been pure reason. You being a young gal, ain't got the faculty. You ain't nowhere near perfect-creature stage. You ain't developed."

There was not a movement from the little dark figure below.

"Argument being uncontradicted, points follow," said Sam'l. "You follow the young man all day, having a notion to see him grin, though a bit o' reasoning power would ha' told you two things, namely, viz., as the lawyers say, he don't want you, and you're lucky to get rid of him. Number one. Secondly, you've been at work destroying his trail, and I'll allow you ha' done it well, for when a young gal takes a labour of love on hand she makes a job of it; but a bit o' reasoning power would ha' told you that your action implied a lack of confidence in the young man. You can't trust him to look after himself. The faculty o' reason would ha' shown you 'tis folly to waste yourself on a man you can't trust. Thirdly, knowing I would be likely to follow his trail, you were worrying about that such a lot you warn't able to think on anything else, and so you hadn't got the ordinary sense to destroy your own. When you ha' got the points fixed in your mind I'll say some more."

Sam'l came down from the rocks and began to break small wood to make his fire.

"I am hungry," called the girl at last.

"Hunger," said Sam'l solemnly, "is a catas-

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trophe attended wi' drawbacks. It ain't as bad as thirst, what makes your body wilt and your tongue swell, and cakes a lot o' black sores on your lips. Thirst is the worst terror this side o' the stars, but there's no call to worry over that here wi' a sweet-water river running at your feet."

"Give me something to eat," said the girl sullenly.

"Faculty o' reason still lacking," said Sam'l. "Try and think it out, my gal. You ain't brought any food with you, therefore you're hungry. You ain't earned any from me. I reckon the argument is unanswerable."

"You, a man, eating before me, watching me starve," she panted angrily.

"I won't watch. I'll set my back towards you. You being hungry is a circumstance I can't do more than make a note of, for I ain't called on to interfere wi' the scheme o' creation what gives me a full belly and you an empty one. Me and you are at different ends. If you was wi' me, I'd give ye all, and if it warn't enough I'd tramp the country to find more. As you're agin me——"

Sam'l started up and escaped from the light of the fire, shouting, "Call, there."

"A friend of both"; and the figure of the storekeeper followed the voice.

"Give me something to eat," cried the girl. "I am starving, and this man has been laughing at me."

"Never smiled," said Sam'l curtly. "'Tis a trick I don't use."

"Your father and me have looked for you all day," said the storekeeper gently; and then he

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gave the girl food: meat, and good, healthy black bread.

She snatched it like a catamount, forgot gratitude, and ran away eating.

Her guardian turned to follow; but the melancholy voice by the fire made him halt.

"Give a gal her own way, and she'll get tired of it. Follow her, and she'll run faster. Let her go, and she'll reckon she ain't worth following. Get at a gal through her vanity. Make her think she's no more than any other, and she'll follow you like a shadow."

"You know women," said the storekeeper.

"I ha' got a fair working knowledge o' creation. I know that if a man says to a gal, 'I'm a worm, and you're an angel,' she's going to take him at his word, and all that man has got to do is to wriggle when she treads on him. You're a man of good intentions, I reckon, but you ain't studied the Book o' Wisdom. What's your natural land?"

"Scotland."

"'Tis a cold country where you don't find a Scotsman and the whisky-bottle. Hear that splash?"

"A fish," said the storekeeper.

"I'm taking a lot o' risks for an old hand," said Sam'l. "Sitting here wi' a fire, rocks all round, and that gal running for the enemy, and sure to find him. It takes more than one to play euchre."

He went down to the edge of the water, and returned with a mass of clay, set it down, and went for more. Without a word, the storekeeper followed,

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and collected clay also. When they had enough, Sam'l drew out his tobacco-bag.

"No bad feeling between me and you," he said quaintly. "I take it kindly you helping me. Gimme your pipe."

The storekeeper did so. Sam'l loaded it with tobacco, and passed it back.

"I'll watch for ye," said the storekeeper.

Sam'l built a few stones beside the fire, and plastered the clay about them, moulding the stuff with deft hands into the rough shape of a human body. He fashioned a head, planted it firmly between the shoulders, adding some grey moss, fastened his coat around the body, crowned the handiwork with his hat, and stepped back to criticise the result. Darkness behind and the dull glow of the fire in front made it satisfactory.

"Man was made out o' clay," he said; then, calling his companion, he pointed to the dummy, adding, "'Tis as good."

"Come away into the bush," said the storekeeper.

He pressed aside a fringe of red willow, and perceived a pathway, very narrow and straight, no more than the width of his foot, leading downwards, well-worn, crossing a crack in the ground, almost too slight to be noticed, by means of a bridge. It was as if children had been playing there.

"A city," exclaimed Sam'l, as the willows closed behind them. "What do you make of it?"

"My eyes ain't so sharp as yours."

"Aye, a wonderful city. Mind how you tread. A lot o' labour has gone into that road, and if you

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was to set your foot down awkward the city council would ha' to repair the damage and raise the rates."

They went on cautiously. The gloom was heavy under the burnt trees, denser there than in other places, and all around the hollow were thickets of dead branches piled up to the height of a man, and bleached grass all very dry; still, they could see the big mounds rising solemnly on either side of the road, the roofs and walls of the city of ants, and away in the dark corners rose tenements all noiseless.

"Roads and side-tracks, avenues and squares, market-place, I reckon, wi' pens for cows," muttered Sam'l. "'Tis all business here; no theatres, no fool-games. They don't take anything from us. No churches neither. 'Tis a comfortable city what don't know the difference between an anabaptist and popery."

They seated themselves on the height above the city and looked down upon it. Bright moonshine lay upon the roads where there was still traffic. Workers were hurrying homewards, some crawling weighed down with burdens, none idling. Then a gang passed slowly, perhaps despairingly, and behind marched a scarlet overseer.

"Slaves," said the storekeeper.

"The scheme o' creation ha' got to be worked out somehow," replied Sam'l. "These bugs ain't perfect creatures any more than we are; it don't worry them whether they're bugs or angels, they don't set up to be more than bugs. They fight; they make slaves. It ain't for us to judge the citizens, for I reckon they do what the Almighty told 'em,

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which is a thing we ain't particular stuck on doing. If they fight, it shows we ha' got to do the same, and there's no way out on't. As for slavery, the government o' this city could teach us a thing or two."

"You ain't in favour of it?" said the storekeeper.

"Scheme o' creation ordained that one lot should be on the top o' the basket, and another at the bottom; and the lot at the bottom are low-down creatures. Simple children o' nature, mebbe, but they ain't fit to be turned loose; they can't learn, and they don't want to; they ha' been given life, and don't know how to use it. A low-down creature is only safe when he's got a master. Slavery was vile, they say; men and brothers warn't made to be used so. I know the lives of the low-down. Give 'em their bellyful o' food and as much religion as they want, and tie 'em up to a master who won't smash 'em because they belong to him. There's more slavery in our world now than there ever was, more flogging and chains, but they call 'em by different names. 'I can sweat 'em to death,' says the master. 'They ain't mine, so I can kill 'em off and get some more.' If hypocrisy was turned into oil the world would be burnt out first time a match was struck. 'Watch the ants,' said old man Solomon. 'Watch 'em, and get wise.'"

"See yon litter o' pine-truck?" said the storekeeper. "Here's a city councillor and grand secretary of half the lodges, by the walk of him."

"There's another, a little black fellow, squirming in the bush."

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"He's watching the city councillor."

"He's got him right on the neck," said Sam'l.

"Now he's off, fast as his legs will take him. The city councillor's kicking."

"Calling the police," said Sam'l. "Bad blood there. 'Tis the right way to settle differences. Civilised folk would go to law, but they ain't cursed wi' that. A city without lawyers wouldn't want much cleaning."

"I reckon yon is the parliament house," said the storekeeper, pointing. "Yon big mound."

"Barracks," said Sam'l. "There's no legislature. The bugs would never sink so low as politics. They govern by their instincts. They ha' no trade, they supply their own wants, they know that a country what can't provide food for its inhabitants is at the mercy of the first enemy that likes to attack it."

Clouds drifted before the moon, Formic City disappeared, and there was silence, broken only by the noise of frogs chanting their ceaseless antiphons. Not a sound came from the restless mounds and the millions which dwelt in them.

"Happy?" asked Sam'l at length.

"Lonesome," said the storekeeper.

"I'll reason it out. The gal has gone, and you know she won't make for home. She's more likely to come back here. We're born to want women, and that means we're born to trouble. It ain't my own idea. There are wiser than me, alive and dead."

"The lonesomeness gets a hold of me," said the

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storekeeper. "There's just me and the old dog. We keep close together for company. I sort o' shiver at nights, when the moon's full and the dog starts up agin the door and barks."

"Man warn't made to be alone," said Sam'l. "The Almighty's idea, not mine."

"I ha' taken life piece by piece, digesting gradual. I'd like to take the rest at a bite."

"No change like a big one. Teetotals get very drunk when they do drink."

"'Tis ill to go along, wi' none to worry ye 'cept the flies."

"Lonesomeness is part of the scheme o' creation," said Sam'l. "'Tis part of the Almighty's scheme that cats should yowl at night. There's a place for all. Every one of them bugs is known and numbered. The Almighty could tell ye the population o' yon city down to the last egg, and He'd have ye remember that every one is wanted in the scheme, and 'twould fall plumb out o' gear if there was one bug more or less. You and me don't seem of much account in the universe, but 'tis a sure thing we're wanted some time, and the history of creation would ha' to be wrote different without us. When you think yourself alone, and your head feels fit to burst into a million pieces, you ain't alone, not if there's a bug on the back of your neck and any old frog croaking in the swamp."

"What wrong wi' ye, partner?"

"Weakening"; and Sam'l passed a hand across his eyes. "I was thinking o' the name o' Nancy," he muttered. "The scheme gets a bit bloody at times."

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"I smell smoke," exclaimed the storekeeper.

Again the moon broke out, and now the high-road was no more like a sleeping serpent. It was thronged and black with ants surging from the town.

"An alarm," whispered Sam'l.

"Fire!" cried his companion.

The peril seemed to leap in an instant from every side. The dead bush was dense and very dry; flames sprang through it with the suddenness of lightning; the long white grass turned into scarlet, and seemed to melt away, after hurling fire upward into the tangle of barren trees. The place roared and whirled.

"The river!" said Sam'l.

It was the only way out. Beating through the smoke, they reached the bank, entered the water, and swam furiously. The moonlight was pitiless to their heads. A shot rang out, missed, and they plunged, rose to take breath, and plunged again, until they reached the shadows opposite, and were safe.

The city of ants was a raging furnace. How many millions were slain none knew.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERFECT CREATURE RUNS

MORE water; the country was covered with it. A small lake looking upon a stiff fringe of carboniferous trees shamefully naked, and a beach of untrodden

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sand spotted with black pebbles; no traffic, and everything peaceful. It was the coal-age back again. There should have been birds with wings of bats and heads of crocodiles; terrible talons should have been thrust from the water; shaggy brutes like wandering mountains ought to have been tearing the trees down. The picture was not finished. Only puny things went by: little insects through the air, and across the sand more youth, folly, vice; but out of it all perfection, down to the girl pathetically following, wet at both eyes.

After all it was the novelty she loved, like Danaë catching to her bare bosom those drops of golden rain, such as she had never seen before. He was so fair, his body so cleanly made; all this was godliness, for who could imagine a god hairy and rough such as Sam'l, or bent and dour like the storekeeper? The girl did not know that such men begin as a woman's true god and end as her evil spirit.

"Why did you run away from me?" she said.

"Terror," was the right answer, but it did not come.

"I lost you in the smoke. I thought he would follow, so I came on as hard as I could."

"Why didn't you kill him?" she cried fiercely. "I gave you a chance."

"The moonlight and the smoke confused me."

"We must get away now, right away. I will follow you wherever you go."

"We have no food."

"I shall not be hungry with you."

He tramped towards a patch of shade, the sun being hot, and stared across the lake.

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"Something is drifting along. A man is coming," he said.

"There is no danger from that side."

"He will go on, and say he has seen me."

"Then we will hide, and you shall say you love me."

"It is a drifting log."

"A raft," she cried.

"Get me food," he said roughly. "Go back to the harbour, and I will wait here for you."

"Sam'l would find you. He is following, following."

"I shall go down," he cried in terror. "Hunger will do for me."

"I am ready to be hungry," she said sulkily, finding a change in him. Somehow, the godliness departed when fear was upon his face.

"The man is lying down. He is thin."

"It is not a man," she said.

The breeze was fresh yonder, drifting the raft onward. It swung round lazily, revealing a long distinct object, unclothed, and, like the first of his species, unashamed; green slime surrounded his legs, and his face was full of gossamers; bull-flies buzzed about him or rested upon his bald head; the sunlight flickered through his ribs; his eye-sockets stared blankly. Once there had been some of the beauty of manhood around those bones; but only the ugliness could endure, that, and a cynical grin.

"He must have been killed," cried the girl, "and his body set to drift upon the lake."

Her companion paid no heed to matters feminine.

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He plunged into the shallow water, waded out, crushing shells and dainty weeds, he was always killing something, reached the raft, and pulled it to the sand, toppling the tenant to its grave. He ran to the trees, dragged out a charred pole, returned to the raft, and prepared to launch out, and at the last moment remembered he had an encumbrance.

"Good-bye," he said. "I can cross on this and gain a day. I am safe now. Thank you for helping me."

"Take me," she cried. "You must take me."

"Don't be foolish," he said petulantly. "The raft won't carry us both."

She ran forward, even into the water, and there something fell between them; at first a speck, a drifting particle not worth a glance, but before the face of the man who had burnt the wonderful city it became a living body with waspish waist, protruding eyes. Nearer it came, hovering, and the eyes of the paltry insect stared into the soul of the Perfect Creature, asking mutely, "What is man?" Then, as he struck out at this captain of millions, it went away.

"Get along home, and don't worry," he said.

"You must not go. I cannot live without you. I will follow and die with you. Take me."

She seized the raft; he put out his hands and forced her back. The raft went away into deep water; and the girl was left with her eyes opened to the knowledge that not every man is a god who looks like one, sobbing and fighting the air.

At last the storekeeper found her, towards the

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fall of day, as he and Sam'l made for the lake; and the girl told them of the raft, but not about herself, for of that there was no need; and Sam'l merely said, "Faculty o' reason ain't far off," and marched along, knowing that from henceforth he would be alone.

"'Tis my duty to take the gal back to her father," said the storekeeper.

"Duty's a hard thing," muttered Sam'l; "but you strike a soft spot in it sometimes."

The girl had her thoughts as they went along, thoughts such as these: "He is not a bad man. He is old: that is all. It is not wicked to be old. He has always been good to me. He gave me this necklet, or at least he promised I should have it, so I went and took it. He looked for me, and brought me food when I was starving. He has always been ready to help me. He would give me things from the store, and tell me about life in the cities, and sometimes he would ask me to sing to him. I—I do not like him much, but he always does whatever I want."

CHAPTER V

THE ARMY PASSES

A GREAT valley stretched away, and beyond it hills bathed in mist heaved up behind ridges of white rock which frowned at the intruder like the turrets of the castle of Giant Despair. It was desolate, a bedevilled place, with booming noises, heavy

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vapours, and the wild whoof of the wind which seemed to have cut a pass out of the stone and worn it smooth. The land throbbed with the life of young creatures, and all the valley appeared to rise and fall, like the bosom of some mighty creature resting in sleep.

There was only one thing worthless, the man who had crossed the lake and escaped from his enemy, the Perfect Creature lurching onward, looking for food, helpless among those who could supply their own needs. Once, in such a place, men had stood, savage and naked, ignorant of all things, yet had lived, found food, made themselves homes, clothed their bodies, gathered knowledge. Their descendant could do nothing; thousands of years of living availed him not at all: the perfect state seemed a failure. He was a stranger upon the face of the earth.

A strip of sand appeared sprinkled with shells, the caked bed scored with rill-marks and dimpled with raindrops. Where the sand ended, a track began, winding towards the bush, making wide curves to show men cannot walk straight, well-beaten and dry. The fugitive walked along it on his way to liberty, until the path gave one last wide curve and entered a tall garden of green bushes.

"Food at last," he muttered, and passed on joyfully, knowing he was saved.

The path became wider, and on each side green corn trembled in a warlike harvest of spears. A log-cabin nestled beneath the white wall of the mountains; the single window was blank, the door fastened, the place looked dumb and blind.

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Knocking brought no hospitality, but, as the intruder stepped aside to peer through the window, a figure like a bear shambled from the bushes. It was a man, or had been meant for one, but the ape in it had conquered; a hairy being, hump-backed, dull-eyed, without emotion or nerves, a creature that hopped and jumped, and made vile noises with its teeth; but of the same species and sharing the glory of the Perfect Creature who stood beside the cabin, straight, tall, well-made, looking like the god that was somewhere in them both. The hairy being put out a thing like a hand and touched the stranger.

"Dry," he muttered.

"Will you give me something to eat?"

"How long ago?" went on the hairy one. "The water was too shallow to float anything what drew more than nine inches. Then the flood came down, and you ran it in a canoe."

This was a kind of madness, the effect of solitude, of harping upon one incident, perhaps of conjuring with lights and shadows, making pictures out of them.

"Eat," he muttered. "I'd like to see ye."

He took the young man and gave him food, standing near and watching in amazement.

"Ten years, twenty, mebbe thirty," he grunted. "You went down awful sudden. Did ye ever see a raft upon the lake?"

"I came across on it."

"I thought it might be you," said the old man, simply. "We ain't seen one another for quite a time. When do you go back?"

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"After I have rested."

"Well, well. Want a rest, do ye? 'Tis the first time I ever saw a drowned man eat," he added in the same foolish voice.

Satisfied at last by the phenomenon of a dead man resting and snoring, the old ape of the cabin went outside and reverted to his original condition. He leapt up and down the path between the hedges of bushy corn, his humped body rising and falling, his stick beating upon the caked earth, perspiration dripping from his uncouth face. He gathered stones and pelted the butterflies. He fastened a rope to a tree, whirled himself round in mad gymnastics, shouting and gasping; and finally flung his bounding body into the shade, to grovel there, licking his fingers and gurgling in his throat.

The end of the day rolled away in black clouds, the atmosphere became cold, and the rocks sweated. A fog drifted down from the mountains, a column of vapour descended into the pass like wool, the unseen heights boomed, and the trees seemed to shiver as they entered the ghost-cloud. A greasy string which held the cabin-door snapped, and the wind whirled round. From the busy field of green corn came a sound as of an army marching.

"Wild nights up here," shouted the old man.

His hair whipped round his neck, and his anthropoidal beard shuddered in the gale.

The sleeper had awakened and felt cold; frightened also by the noises and the face of the madman.

"I'm going outside," he said.

"'Tis fine! I set out there most nights. Solitude, bugs, and me night after night. Come out!

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The corn will keep the wind off ye. Hark to it. Don't it tell ye things? Don't it shout? Don't it seem to howl at ye? Set on this log, and tell me how 'tis to be dead."

The heavy waves of wind flogged them. A mad sound came from the heights, where a great boulder was leaping from ridge to ridge, cleaving splinters and striking fire through the roar of the fog-wind.

"Him's the company I keep," shouted the most man-like monkey.

There was more, a creeping presence, a whiff of warriors; and along the wind came lights, glowing dimly, carried here and there, struggling onward; behind the lights millions of small things, below as many more, advancing as one body, as a great fighting machine, able to crush and kill; a host well-disciplined, a silent army, a reasoning army.

Beside the cabin the light-carriers hovered, holding their own against the wind. Very faint was the glow from the particles of fluor-spar retained by their legs, sufficient to act as a guide and to illumine small black bodies and gauzy wings. The soil was covered with the serried ranks of those who marched by the guidance of the lights. They took possession of the path, advanced interminably. Another group of tiny lanterns drifted round the corner of the cabin. A second host was there. It was a terrible progress; no sound other than the booming of the wind, not a tread nor a whisper, not a sight of any weapon; only millions of eyes which glistened and shone with vengeance.

"Come back!" shouted the old man suddenly;

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for his companion was running, throwing out his arms, fighting and struggling with an enemy hardly visible.

"I am being stung to death, stifled. They are in my mouth, my nose, and my eyes."

"Keep your head up," shouted the madman, running after him. "Swim as hard as you can. Catch the rope. Hold on! I'll drag you in. Strike out!"

He flung his rope into the wind and it caught the corn. Not an insect settled on him, though his feet crushed thousands. The cabin was rustling with life.

A dark figure ahead ran for the hills, to find itself a place to hide in from the vengeance of contemptible creation. The hosts streamed on.

CHAPTER VI

THERE IS A HUNT

WHAT is more fearful than mad terror in a solitude? First along the plain, then up the hills, and now down into the depths; towards the clouds, and, failing a city of refuge there, into the earth, deep down where it was dark, into rank bush, which was the home of miasma and a heat that pricked. Anything to escape from a pitiless enemy which was as the eye of God.

There fetid swamps where bubbles burst, mud stank, and things writhed unseen because of the dense undergrowth covering the face of the ground,

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so that advance could only be made by wrigglings between vines and webs of branches; loops of vegetation caught at the fugitive's throat; his feet groped in filth; fallen trunks which looked solid in the gloom were so decayed that his legs sank through the pulp and his feet reached a mass of rottenness beneath; slime from the lower branches dripped upon his face, bunches of rotten leaves spread themselves into dirt when clutched, bitter flakes lodged in his throat. And the captains of millions followed.

Then to the open plateau. Another evening settled, and the sky was bloody, full of red tongues whispering vengeance; an angry sunset with no voluptuous glamour of amatory birds or sleep-inclined flowers. Cold rocks pushed their ridges towards the night-clouds. Thistles with fluffy seed-caps and leaves armoured with prickles told of swords. Bushes with thorns spoke of daggers. The very sky ran scarlet.

Away, where the rockland fell into gloomy hollows and vegetation failed, there appeared what once had been a hut, like the skeleton of some huge amphibian, faint light flickering through its bleached ribs, particles of what might have been skin flapping. Bats shuddered about this structure, blundering in and out without a whisper of wing.

Towards this work of human hands, which was a ruin and a failure among things that endured, came a figure running blindly, the chill of the evening upon his body, the chill of fear within, and heat upon his face. Above his head floated scouts, never falling back, never descending, too

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proud to ride upon him. The runner was the man who had destroyed the wonderful city.

"If I could cover this," muttered the hunted man. "If I could make myself a place to hide in—but they would starve me out. This open plain is the worst place, but I can see them, see them coming."

The contemptible insects hovered, describing slow circles, their tiny eyes watching, glowing, following every movement.

"It will be moonlight. They will never lose sight of me. A storm, a great storm, might scatter and drive them back. A fire, another fire! But there is nothing to burn."

Sam'l was forgotten. The hand of a man, the cunning of mere man, were terrors without stings. Human brain, human heart and hatred, human weapons were comprehensible. He could meet them, fight them, succeed against them. But Nature was here, cruel Nature, the mother with red hands.

He had burnt out the city as a conqueror, knowing that the people were his. Was he not Man, the perfect, the magnificent, master of creation, lord of lions and lice? had he not powers of life and death over the beasts? could he not crush the lower orders, slaughter them as he willed, hunt them to death, cut them open to amuse himself, tear them, stamp on them, rend them asunder, exterminate them? What human law could touch him? What God had the animals? None. He was man, and above the life which moved on four legs, six legs, or a hundred legs;

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above Nature also, for she could not protect the weak; the small things were in the hands of man, were condemned without trial and killed by man; and who could save them? Who could protect the mute and puny insect, except the Maker of them, by issuing His miracle?

Now he fully comprehended the espionage upon him established by the foe; knew that a decree had gone out against him, that the survivors from the city had fled to the plains, the mountains, the bush; that winged messengers had hurried into every solitary place to stir up the hosts. By the testimony of his own eyes he knew that an army which no man could number pursued him, wood-ants, flying ants, white bush-ants, yellow and red soldier ants, brown slave ants, armed with stings and poison; all leagued together by an alliance having for its object, not intercession with, nor flattery of, nor worship for the beauty and strength and perfection of the sovereign man, but the extermination of a big two-legged, round-headed, ridiculous brute.

Vain was the man's perfection then. He mounted a barren hill and looked back. Dull as the light was, he could yet see the land alive and rippling like wheat or water. That army of Nature would have crossed mountains and choked rivers; all the splendid weapons of contending civilisations could not have stopped them; nothing could have driven them back except a force of nature, fire, or tempest, and no storm was coming upon the land. Only a calm night, with its fill of moonshine.

"A river!" he shouted. "This desert cannot

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stretch out for ever. A wide river which they could not cross."

Again he set out, but his feet soon lagged; other enemies joined in the pursuit, hunger, exhaustion, and despair. Darkness fell, and the moon appeared, investing the hills with the cold splendour of icebergs. The wings of the escort shone like flakes of mica. One he killed, and rejoiced over the deed as if he had slain the man who had threatened to take his life.

He flung himself down, tormented with thirst; seized a handful of dripping leaves, sucked them, and, reviving a little, looked back. Only the moonlight shivered there; but, as he searched, another group of winged insects came along, keeping out of reach, and hovered above his head, as though in obedience to a word of command. It was the changing of the guard. The former group floated away, the watch went on, with all its former silence and monotony and the horror of espionage; the mechanical nature of the act, the military precision, the significance of the change, all pointed to the end. There was to be no mercy, no reprieve at the last moment. The slayer of millions was to die.

"A bush! A dry bush that I could fire."

Another hill rose from the plateau, and he climbed it to learn how far away were the avenging hosts. It was not easy to find them, though the moon was bright, and the fugitive dared to hope. They had ceased to advance, the ground rippled no longer, it was at rest beneath the grey, the black, and the red of those armies which coloured the plain so much farther than any eye could reach. The

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insects were, after all, mortal like himself; they waited for their supplies to come up, for they too needed food and rest. The forces were bivouacked upon the plain.

"I will go among the mountains and hide myself," cried the fugitive. "I am a man, I am a strong man, and they are stinking bugs."

CHAPTER VII

SAM'L IS ASTONIED

A NOTE of impatience saluted Sam'l as he turned over and broke his sleep. Beside the cave where he had taken shelter for the night was a dwarf tree, its slim stem black, its branches white, its leaves dark on one side and silvery grey upon the other; and midway perched a solitary pipit, with a bead of an eye fixed upon the man-mountain.

"I'm Sam'l," said the man.

The little bird answered after its own manner, and hopped joyously along the twig.

"Breakfast? Wait a while. 'Tis belly first wi' you, and I ain't sure if it ain't belly before prayers wi' me. What do you think of a man now you see one? Eccentric sort o' beetle, ain't he?"

The bird danced and twittered excitedly, becoming impatient when the pack was produced, and it saw a largess of crumbs.

"Eat hearty, and don't belch this way," said Sam'l. "Ain't you just flying out o' your feathers? Know I wouldn't hurt ye, for we're partners. Got something to tell me, I reckon, but I don't know

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your talk. You speak too fast and run one word into another. There 'tis, we men ain't in sympathy wi' the world we've got to live in."

Nature was kind to Sam'l, who had done no violence. She brought him the little lone bird of the bush, as a token of her good-will, to cheer him in his loneliness, to sing and dance before him; for Nature is kind to those of her children who love her.

The sun came over the mountains, breakfasting on fog and dew, swallowing huge tracts of mist, making the land clear. Sam'l dragged himself from the cave and listened, shivered, beat his hands together, and stamped his feet upon the rock.

"I climbed higher than I thought. 'Tis easy to climb in the dark when you can't see ahead. Come along, little fowl."

Before them the rockland broke sharply. As he approached the edge, which seemed to make one of the boundaries of the world, the country below unfolded, and he looked upon a barren wilderness of stone and thorn-bush. A steep path, ghostly with gossamers, descended in zigzags, well worn by the feet of mountain rams. There appeared to be nothing much in sight, no life at all; the land looked naked, but it was not. The legions that crept were there.

"Sam'l," said the watcher at last. "Look close. Tell little brownie what you see."

He placed his hands about his eyes and stared.

"You came to tell me about this," he went on. "It ain't grass moving, for there's neither wind nor weed down yonder. Those patches o' colour are moving, and the earth's fixed."

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Down the zigzag path went the little man, with never a stumble, moving as freely as the bird above him. His physical condition was perfect, his breath came easily, there was no distress, not a muscle was at fault, nor did his eyes err; and all things were friendly, from the royal sun above to the soil beneath.

"There's something doing. Scheme o' creation is at work again."

So he advanced cautiously, in some fear, because it seemed to him that the Creator was walking upon the plateau, teaching Nature how to work, and the weak how to defend themselves against oppression, and he was afraid lest his eyes might be opened too much. He went from rock to rock. Nothing escaped his eyes. His ears were open to the smallest sound. Suddenly he stopped, placing a hand upon the foremost leg, as though to check himself, then flung himself beneath a projecting ledge, murmuring hoarsely, "It ain't for me."

A horrible voice was crying in the wilderness.

Drawing himself over the ledge, Sam'l looked, afraid of the gift of sight. The plateau was hidden beneath a mass of insects swarming up, clustering upon the piles of rock, pouring in hordes, in troops, in shoals, like sand blown up by the wind, and all making for the same hole in the rocks, and passing in; and inundations of winged insects descended from above, and legions of wingless ones ascended from below; wave after wave struck the wall to disappear, and yet other hosts came on, and still more after them in millions, until the very light seemed to fail. And when Sam'l turned his burning

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eyes towards the hills they saw a new multitude, which no man could number, crossing and descending; and on all other sides fresh armies of those that ran and those that flew, a new legion every instant, another deluge each minute, a cloud of vengeance with every puff of wind, one myriad crushed upon another. There was no room for more either upon the plateau or within the air, the rocks streamed like water with tiny bodies, that hole was more than full. And still they came, from every part of heaven and earth.

The voice had ceased. There was no sound except that awful rustling; nothing to proclaim it was not all the dream of imagination, except a strong, sour smell.

"I ain't got to it," said Sam'l. "Seems to me 'tis agin the rules, and I can't follow it. Scheme o' creation deals us each a hand and says, 'Play it how you like, play it fair or false, keep to the rules or break 'em, I won't interfere; only, when you've played, I'll kill ye, I'll take ye by the neck and shake the life out, whether you ha' played fair or false.' Times we can understand the scheme; times it goes beyond us. The wisdom o' the world don't help."

The advance had ceased. Flights hurried to the rear, and presently the rippling movements resumed, the sea of insects fell back, its work of inundation finished. Like the tide, it ebbed away, leaving the rocks naked to the sun.

It was not a solitude then, for the silence had become a presence. Sam'l came forward, bare-headed, bent towards the hole, but restrained him-

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self. Then he gathered stones, and piled them up, so that no man should know what was there.

"Man's a miracle," he said, "but not the only one. The bug is a miracle too. There's as much life hidden away in a creeping thing you can't see as in a Giant Goliath; and I reckon the little one is the biggest wonder of the two. There's no playing agin the scheme o' creation, neither wi' fair nor wi' crooked tools. The best comes to the top, and the worst goes to the bottom. And, mebbe, the bug is one o' the best."

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III

A REMINISCENCE CONCERNING A WOMAN

I AM just now between two pictures, one stern, the other soft; the unsatisfied sea in front, restless and roaring; behind, a lane quite warm, sheltered from the wind, and full of primroses. A church bell is ringing somewhere, for it is Sunday evening, a time of melancholy, of sentiment, a time looked forward to by young folk eager to make love, a time of memories for the man who is still alone in the world and knows he has walked foolishly, a time when he wishes neither to be alone nor with a comrade, for his heart is unhappy at the sound of that bell ringing to evensong, and his mind is as unsatisfied and as restless as the sea.

You may walk to the lane and look down it, seeing the banks of grass and the primroses warm with sunshine where the shadows do not fall. Notice, however, it is not the sunshine, but these shadows that are prominent; they stand out so sharply that you must consider them before passing on to the enjoyment of golden light and pale flowers.

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One side of the lane is altogether in shadow, and here the sea has an angry sound. It is like life, darkness upon one side, brightness upon the other; shadows great and small between the gleams of sunshine, the smallest not the least reproachful, the sharpest that one which was not to be avoided; the shadow sent to be a skeleton at your feast, the shadow which has always given good advice in vain, the shadow that haunts, the shadow which took away your faith, the shadow which brings dreams, and the shadow which makes you sometimes despair. It is a sad assembly, and, though we may pass through life laughing, they lie behind, and we can always see them when we look back, as we must, on the Sunday evening, when a bell is ringing softly, and young people are kissing in the byways. We see the primroses as well, that is true, but we cannot brush the shadows off them.

I would quote an old saying, changing a word, but not its first letter: "Truth is sadder than fiction." However sad our story-book, there is the consolation of knowing it to be false; a shadow itself, it may not cast one. No writer shall record the sufferings of his characters so that their pain may make a shadow on our lives. Even the appalling agony of a King Lear becomes nothing when the one we love lies dead. It is when we get rid of these inverted commas and face the experience of which we have read, when the pain stalks from cold print and strikes us, it is only then that we feel, and know, that we have lost life and a part of the happiness we started with. We come out of the clouds, as it

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were, and hit the earth; and, though the wound may heal, a scar remains. So we need sadness in fiction, if for no other reason than to blunt the sorrow of experience. Where is the man or woman who cannot look back upon one particular shadow blackening the path behind, with the utterance, "It is a small thing, to others it would be nothing; but it has happened to me, and is therefore sadder than anything I have read"?

The church bell has stopped. We will not go in that direction, because we should only be tormented by the singing of old chants and evening hymns, which would call up more ghosts. Let us find a quiet place, here, where we can see the sunlight slowly leaving the primroses, and hear the roar of the sea; and, if the rain does come, we shall not feel it much. I will tell you the story of my shadow, that little sharp-pointed one which will not leave me, which, I believe, never will leave me. The shape of it forms, as I look, into a tree covered with orange-blossom.

I have often asked myself whether I did really love Marguerite while she lived, or whether it was her tragedy that made me love her. I knew her only by her Christian name, which was Margaret, but to me she was always Marguerite, because the suggestion of a flower was so much stronger than that of a pearl. I never spoke to her. She was not, I am told, of my estate in life, and that was a hindrance to an acquaintanceship which was, indeed, never made. I might have addressed her, have forced myself upon her and introduced my-

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self; I had opportunities, but not the courage. I was only twenty-two, and very nervous; as conceited, probably, as most boys, if unusually shy. So I never addressed her, although I heard her voice, but not more than twice. It was sweet and low.

I cannot describe Marguerite, partly because it would be impossible to satisfy myself by any description, and partly because of the strange fact that when I try to look at that delicious little face I cannot recall what it was like. Her hair was dark, certainly, but not black, and I can remember her teeth, her feet; I think, with this pencil, I could give the outline of her nose, and there is one ear, or rather the lobe of it, too small, I used to think, to be of much use, which remains; but though I loved her, and so gladly would have crowned her with orange-blossom, I cannot tell you the colour of her eyes. Do not smile at this, please. A small thing, listener, but it is my shadow, and you will respect it for the sake of your own, which I know is as sharp to you.

Marguerite stands forth in my memory, apart from my heart, as the most beautiful creature who has ever passed my way in life. Age? Eighteen when I first knew of her; and she was only nineteen when she died, so it was very short. She could never have known how much I admired her, that, indeed, I admired her at all, because I was too shy to look at her boldly, her beauty and wonderful sex frightened me; but she sent me a message when she was dying, she sent me a message of gratitude, though she did not know

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me. She went into another world with my name on her lips, though she did not know my name, or what I was like, or whether I was old or young; but she died with a message of thanks to the Englishman, the "kind" Englishman. Perhaps it was "nice" Englishman. I hope so; but cannot be sure.

I met Marguerite for the first time upon a Friday, at nine minutes past two. I distinctly remember the position of the hands upon the clock of the post-office. I was returning to the office where I worked as a law-student at the end of my luncheon interval, and she came quickly round the corner, and sent the breath out of me. With a little good-fortune she would have actually brushed against me. Her eyes met mine for one instant, roguish eyes they were, for she was happy then, dropped just as I averted mine, and then she hurried on, those feet I remember so well flickering along like two butterflies playing across a desert; possibly she was, like me, behind her time. I confess I was weak enough to walk after her a little and watch her out of sight; and, on returning to the office, I began to draw up a deed under difficulties, because this girl became the party of the first part, and the party of the second part, and the witness to the whole. No experienced man of the world would have been so foolish; but I was an impressionable boy. Nor must it be forgotten that Nature had made a special effort for Marguerite, and the mould in which she had been cast was never to be used again. The city where we met and parted is situated several thousand miles

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from London. It was then the City of Enchantment. It is now the City of Desolation. Since then it has grown enormously, the population has more than doubled, those horrible side-streets have been demolished; it has prospered instead of being blasted like Sodom. Had it not been for the murder of Marguerite—don't shrink, listener—I might have been there now, fat with this world's goods, not here alone with you between the sea and the lane, with this pencil in my hand.

To discover the nature of Marguerite's employment was not difficult. There was a large drapery-store at a corner where the horse-cars turned, a corner where men loafed, niggers especially, smoking cigarettes and staring at the women; there was generally a lot of yellow dust whirling there, for the streets were badly kept in those days; and Marguerite worked in that store. She was a shop-girl, that was all; she sold linens and laces and all manner of trifles to other women, and did it prettily, I tell you. There was nothing dishonourable in her occupation, it did not lower Marguerite in my sight; but I did not like to think of her running the gauntlet of those men at the corner. I am certain she was good and pure; I believe she lived alone, having no relations in the city to care for her; but I do not know where she lodged, nor did I ever seriously ask myself whether her life was in danger in that city. I was too young to reason much.

Tell me, what should a man do when he falls in love with a woman who crosses his path? To

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stop her and say, "I love you," wants courage, and looks like the act of a libertine. No honourable man could do so, neither could any decent woman answer. Day after day, shy men—yes, there are plenty—pass shy women in the street, pass the very women who would make earth heaven for them, not actually knowing it, but feeling it; and their union of one glance endures but one instant; they are separated by the crowd, and never meet again. Yet he cannot speak; it is against the law for him to say a word, or for her to answer; and, even if he broke the law, she could not. If she could answer, might he not be tormented with the thought that she had answered others? What might have happened had I only spoken to Marguerite, and assured her that I meant it; had I written to her, paid a little nigger boy to carry a note to the beautiful young lady in that corner drapery? if I had found myself with the moral courage to make her acquaintance somehow, if by violence? It might have meant the making of two lives; it might have prevented horror, pain, and death; it might have meant, I believe, happiness for us both. Assuredly it would have saved her life, and there would not be that grave somewhere: "Marguerite miserrima. Aged nineteen." I cannot tell you where she lies buried, or whether there is a tombstone. I had not the courage to interfere, nor the right.

What a number of opportunities I had, making them for myself, then permitting them to lapse. One occasion in particular I recall, when I only just restrained myself. It was July, a blinding,

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stifling, tropical midday, reeking of cigar-ends, as I stepped upon the street, fresh and scented from the hands of a deft Cuban barber, feeling, I dare say, no small Apollo. Marguerite came by. The street was a rich yellow under the sun. She did not appear human, transfigured as she was by that intense heat. I could not name that figure, as it is foolish to talk about angels and fairies, or any other beings without corporeal existence. She was herself transformed, all in white, bridal skirts, child-like sash, snowy baby-shoes, white flowers, and still I cannot recall her face. I advanced, conscious that my mouth was very dry, knowing it was open to speak, I fancy I put out my hand as if I would have touched her. Had she only looked round then, you would not be listening to this story; but she did not look round; probably she did not even notice me, being blinded by the sun. She passed on, regarding me no more than the figure of the wooden Indian which stood outside the barber's shop.

Somehow, I looked upon Marguerite as mine, and with a kind of mad chivalry, like that of the knight of La Mancha, I determined to take care of her and protect her, merely by following her as she passed to and fro, and by gazing longingly after her. I was the dumb character in a drama where I had been given a speaking part, and suffered from stage fright too much to appear in it. But I did not guess a drama was being played; it never even occurred to me that a girl so lovely as Marguerite would be sought after by others, that, while a boy was dreaming, a man would be acting;

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that what was going on was not comedy, but pitiful everyday tragedy which the player must not show. I never reflected upon the possible entry of a villain. It is strange how kindly a boy of gentle birth judges the world when he steps into it from the serene atmosphere of home, school, and university life. It is astonishing how little he knows of vice, but it is terrible when he awakens to it, realises it, and one awful day knows he is himself infected. The whole world changes for him at once, the serene atmosphere has gone for ever; if he has sinned himself, it may be he grows callous; if he has been sinned against, he becomes often cynical and hard-hearted. Had I been older and more experienced, had I seen the darker and true colours of life, I might have guessed the presence of a villain; I might have been bold enough to play my part. Is there not a great difference here between life and fiction? When we have read the first few chapters of our story, there is nothing to hold us except the charm of the author's style and the variety of his incidents, because we clearly foresee the last; but in life we cannot look ahead, not even a day; though the story may run in an ordinary groove, we are unforeseeing fools, we turn the page down, and wonder excitedly what is coming next.

I was acquainted with most of the English residents—I will not give the name of this cursed city—but had no particular friend among them. My constant companion was a young man who was a native of the country, a short, dark-skinned youth of my own age, unmistakably touched with

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the tar-brush, but, like many a mongrel, as true as steel. He was in fact the most faithful and devoted creature I have ever known, and he loved me in a downright fashion; nor was there the least objection, from a professional point of view, to my going about with him, as he belonged to the local aristocracy, and had the entry to almost as many English houses as myself. He was a skilful violinist, indeed something more than skilful, and, knowing how fond I was of music, would spend hours in my rooms, walking slowly up and down, his dark head bent over the instrument, his black eyes growing wild with the ecstasy of his own music. I was much troubled with headache in those days, and nothing soothed me so much as the sounds of Billy's violin, and the good fellow was always ready to play. So intimate were we, and so complete was the connection between my mind and his, that I was able to lie upon my bed in one room, and, by sheer will-power, make him play whatever tune I desired, as he walked up and down in the other. Sometimes I failed, but not often.

It was an evening early in August, and I was walking with Billy about the streets, and, perhaps, like young fools, we had drunk more than was necessary, though the heat was great and the yellow dust stifling, when he asked, "Ever been out to the Park?"

I inquired what he meant, and he answered, "It's about five miles out. They have dancing there after dark. An awful wicked place. Let's go out."

I demurred at first, though I wanted to go, but

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was afraid that, if it got to the ears of the very respectable firm with which I was connected, there might be trouble; but youth and folly prevailed, and I went.

At that time there were only horse-cars about the city, but an electric railway, which was something of a novelty, had recently been constructed beside the road out to the Park, or what was called a road, for it was nothing but undulating ridges of yellow clay, dry and caked then, but in winter, or after any heavy storm, practically impassable. The country surrounding the city was wild. Directly civilisation was left behind, the car entered an uncultivated region, buzzed through jungles of tropical undergrowth, where it lost the road altogether, went along a terrace cut above the river, which was densely wooded upon each side, and stopped finally at the end of a pontoon-bridge which led over to the Park. Here we paid a few cents for admission, with others, all young people, I noticed, and for the most part in couples, white, black, and yellow; some oddly assorted, niggers with white girls, white men with young negresses, most of them horribly serious, not shouting or laughing, but speaking in whispers. There was a detestable feeling in the air.

The Park was a large island lying in the bed of the river, covered with trees; a few spaces had been cleared, paths had been cut here and there, and much of the bush had been removed. Upon one of the clearings a merry-go-round was at work, the organ attached to it playing the same tune hour after hour. I have never heard that

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tune elsewhere, but I could at this moment whistle every note. Upon other clearings were dancing-rooms, two of them, and in each a fiddle was scraping, and we could see couples whirling round with that dreadful solemnity which seemed to be the rule of the place. They were cheap wooden structures like huge cages, their sides composed chiefly of wire-gauze, to admit what air there was, and to keep out the mosquitoes. But it was the light which made the whole place ghastly and the scene like a nightmare. Wires had been strung about among the trees and round the clearings, but not elsewhere, and to these were attached electric-lamps, which appeared to me to give a peculiarly unpleasant light, or rather a suggestion of light; probably this was because there were not enough of them. We passed through a sort of sulphureous twilight, able to distinguish outlines, and thus avoid walking into couples, but hardly able to see each other's eyes. The dancing-rooms were much better lighted.

It was not long before I found myself shivering, cold one instant, sweating the next, and hardly daring to look round or to listen. The character of the place was obvious, and, though many a city in half-savage countries has such a hell near it, this was my first experience in one. I was only twenty-two, and life is hot at that age. To speak the truth, I was frightened, I had not left the gentle atmosphere of refinement long enough to be able to bear it. Those faces, especially the faces of the girls in the dancing-sheds, or as they passed, barely visible beneath one of the lamps, made me

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feel sick. I had to get accustomed to it: I had set woman on a high altar, and had never thought to see in her eyes *that* look. The heat was awful; and there was the organ grinding, grinding its one tune, and those spectral wooden horses whirling in the gloom, and the animal laughter from every side.

"I must clear out of this, Billy," I said. "My head is aching."

The man was a friend in every sense; I had but to suggest, and he would agree instantly. He put his arm in mine, and we turned away, walked down to the river, crossed, and were soon whirled away to the city, where I have an idea we entered a saloon and stayed too long.

What has all this to do with Marguerite? You shall hear. Some days after my visit to the Park, I cannot say how many, but the month was the same, the virus which had entered into me there completed the period of incubation, and the disease broke out. I wanted to go there again. The desire came upon me on a Saturday evening: my work was done, the heat of the day was over, I was alone, I saw couples walking towards the bridge where the electric-cars started, and I went with them through the yellow dust and the cigarette-ends and great discarded crescents of melon-rind, trying to brace myself up to be a man of the world.

Marguerite stood upon the bridge. At the very moment my eyes fell upon her, I saw a hand upon her arm, and she advanced, unwillingly, I think, as if she was being dragged, but was afraid to protest or make a scene. A man was with her,

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not young and slim, but stout, rather elderly, although forty seemed a great age to me then, dark, full of base nigger blood, and bad-eyed. His hand was very dark, hellishly so, I thought, and I noticed the flash of a diamond ring. He was not, I imagine, a resident of the city, very likely a traveller, perhaps a cotton-grower or a dealer; I never discovered, and it is no matter. But this great nigger-brute was dragging Marguerite out to the Park.

I struggled my hardest to get upon the same car, but failed. A lot of people were waiting, and it had filled before I could reach the step. All sorts of wild ideas flashed across my mind. Should I go for Billy, tell him everything, ask him to come with me? Should I return home, get my revolver, follow that man, find him somehow, and blow his brains out? Remember, I was only a boy, and there was some reason for my terror. At last I reached a car, and for the second time buzzed towards the Park.

To relate what happened that evening is only necessary in as far as this narrative partakes of the nature of a confession of certain incidents in a young man's life. Let me say at once that I did not find Marguerite. When I struggled into the car it was already crowded, and I had to stand, holding on to a strap. For some time I took no notice of my fellow passengers, until I felt a gentle pressure upon my foot. Then I discovered I was standing before a young woman, and, when she glanced up, I saw a face which I suppose many people would have regarded as far more beautiful

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than Marguerite's; I saw also a figure which could not have been surpassed, tiny hands and feet, crisp black curls, a marvellous colouring, all the fascination of the siren without any of the virtue of a woman. She was a young Creole, about seventeen, perfect physically, a type of female beauty, and a triumph of animalism. I tried to draw back from her, but could not, so crowded was the car. Do not think there was anything of the good young man about me. Certainly I was very nervous, but that was not altogether the reason why I wanted to change my position. I loathed this lovely creature. I had seen her eyes, they were those of the Park, I could feel the passion emanating from her, and, above all, I was thinking of Marguerite, comparing her sweet face with this bold loveliness which was the beauty of body and nothing else.

Again that pressure on my foot. This is perhaps a descent into egoism, but you perceive the crow's-feet of middle-age, and you know well enough she would not have desired me now. Twenty years ago there were, possibly, physical advantages, a tall figure and fair English skin, that might have appealed to her. She stamped upon my foot, and I was helpless to withdraw it. That insignificant white shoe was angry, and was soon to grow spiteful, because beauty does not like to be snubbed; while I was in a misery of cold heat, never meeting her eyes, without the courage to speak or to expostulate, wedged in so firmly I could not get away from her. I saw those dark-skinned little hands clenched, I guessed the shape of the red mouth and the set

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of those tiny vampire teeth. I could see the rise and fall of that dainty knee, and the scented white skirts as she pounded at my foot, making me wince; for the little tigress was furiously angry and was doing her best to hurt me. The car was very hot, drops of perspiration were running down my face, and dropping, I suppose, on my tormentor. And yet she was so lovely, this child, far too young and beautiful for such a game as this, far too ideal in face and form to be consumed with passion for any strange man who happened to take her fancy; the mixed blood in her was boiling because I would not bend and speak, so she made me suffer, using, before the horrible journey was over, the sharp heel of her shoe, bruising my foot pitilessly.

When the car stopped, the beautiful vampire flew away alone, being at home there, and I reckoned on seeing her no more. No doubt my face was very stern as I crossed the bridge, limping somewhat, still like the foolish knight of La Mancha, vowed to some act of chivalry for the sake of Dulcinea, although, I fear, with none of his mad courage, for had I seen Marguerite and the villain I could not have done anything. The gods had offered me Marguerite, and I did not know how to accept the gift; so they had tossed her aside contemptuously to some one else.

I heard the sound of that organ grinding its one tune, and, beyond, the scraping of a fiddle in the dancing-shed. The same ghastly light was upon everything. The river was bright with moonshine, but none of that light could enter

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there. It was a close, sticky kind of heat, the air was unwholesome, the Park was a fever-stricken haunt. More nervous than ever without my friend, I stood beneath a tree, thinking myself invisible, but I was in white flannel, and two young daughters of Venus, one a negress, ran up like wild bacchanals and caught hold of me. I escaped from them and went towards an open space, stumbling over the roots of trees and other things, came to the largest of the dancing-sheds and entered, not because I hoped to find Marguerite there, but the place was well lighted, and it was more healthy watching the dancers than to grope about in that twilight of ill-fame outside.

There were several couples waltzing solemnly, though the place was not crowded, and at once I saw my tormentor floating past in the embrace of a hideous flat-faced white man, very simply attired in shirt and breeches, chewing tobacco all the time, and at every turn spitting over his partner's shoulder. The sight was not altogether unpleasant, because the girl was so lovely and her dancing so exquisite; and the terrible man with her danced divinely too, so that one forgot her nature and his coarse ways in the delight of watching their bird-like flights.

It was a mistake that I did watch, because my admiration was misunderstood. Not once did I meet the girl's eyes, though I made the discovery that she wore a wedding-ring, and I supposed she was so absorbed in the dance as not to notice me; but directly the fiddling ceased she left her partner, walked straight across to where I stood, her face

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no longer smiling lazily with the pleasure of the dance, but passionate, her teeth clenched, her movements very poetical, if snake-like, I confess I was fascinated and could not move, nor take my eyes from her, so extraordinary was this child's beauty, and yet so appalling, and while I stood there, as stupid as a sheep, she cried, with all the madness of a fury, "You young devil," and boxed my ears with all the strength of that small brown hand, adding something which I hardly heard and could not repeat.

Here occurs a hiatus in my memory. The next scene that comes clearly before me is a flight of fire-flies. I have no recollection of what happened from the time that child beat me until I was in the car travelling towards the city. I imagine there was a shout of laughter, a sudden crowding round me, that I burst through and escaped, for, though I might be nervous, I was no weakling; very likely I ran, and was cursed by the couples over whom I stumbled; I have an idea I heard the organ grinding in the distance; but nothing stands out in high relief until I had crossed the river. A car with an open trailer waited upon the track. I climbed into the front seat of the trailer, which was not behind the car, but attached to the front, so that I was able to get the full benefit of the breeze as we swept along; and then memory becomes again clear as I see the fire-flies crossing to and fro.

The trailer was practically empty, as the pleasure-seekers on the unholy island would not be returning to the city for a long time. Thankful to be alone,

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I removed my hat, and let the night air dry the sweat from my face, while I revelled in the pure moonlight and the glorious scenery, watching the dark festoons of tropical vegetation almost brushing my head, the great shining river below, the white moths crossing our headlight, and, above all, the fire-flies rising and falling. I saw fire-flies every night, for I lived out of the city, and what I was pleased to call my garden, though it was not a garden, nor did it belong to me, was haunted with thousands of them ; but never before or since have they appealed to me as they did then, swerving against the dark background of bush like little souls coming out of darkness, flashing for a few nights in the world, and returning to darkness. I seemed to see the life of Marguerite there, and my own going to and fro seeking hers, two tiny sparks of fire, neither giving out light enough to find the other, two little evasive stars wandering against the dark background of the world, each upon its own orbit, passing often, but never allowed to meet, because of the stern fate which condemned my life to follow one curve and hers another, and thus avoiding each other in space for ever.

I am sorry if I grow tedious, listener. To make amends, I will pass over the autumn and winter, a period of storms containing one wild week of lightning and earthquake, such as I had never known ; some nights so fearful that it seemed as if the city was about to be destroyed, when Billy sat with me, and turned the violence of Nature into a theme for his violin. I saw little of Marguerite, and at last nothing. She had left the drapery-

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store. I had not much spare time except on Sundays, and then I would sometimes wander all about the city looking for her; but I did not find her, and never saw her again, although I was to be near her at the end.

We came to the roaring time of spring. All the country was flooded, and damp winds made the fireside a joy. I sat one evening in my little room, and passed presently into that state of torment of despair and loneliness which comes so often to young men at the outset of their career. I was tired of life already; I was not a success at my profession, it did not suit me, I had no love for it, and instead of attending to my duties I preferred to write poetry. Then I thought of Marguerite. Really it was of her I had been thinking the whole time, for it was she who was responsible for that mood of misery. I wanted her; even if I could not have her for my own, I wanted to see her walking about the city, surrounded with her own wonderful atmosphere. It was then I resolved to make a great effort to find her, upon the evening of that night which was to end the drama, to end my life in that city, and to make that shadow which is lying upon the primroses. Before another hour had passed, I was to have my eyes opened, as with a hot iron, to the physical weakness of woman and the damnable strength of man; I was to hear the story which began with the world and will end with it; I was to be at last under the same roof as Marguerite; and, before morning came, I was to stand again in that room, with a knowledge of the world and of human nature, with a mark upon me; I was to depart from

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youth and enter manhood; I was to lose the kindly feeling for my fellow creatures, and hate them all, every man and woman who lived in that accursed city, except Billy my friend, the two poor Irishmen, and Jeannie the harlot.

Unable to endure the loneliness longer, the shadow was forming then, and I felt it somehow, I drew on my coat and went out. My little residence was built upon piles, and a ladder led down from the door, a means of entrance and exit sometimes difficult and occasionally dangerous. I had hardly descended, when I saw a dark figure approaching among the trees. It was Billy, and he welcomed me, I thought, with more feeling than usual. They will tell you coincidences do not happen in real life, but it is only in the true story that the remarkable coincidence does happen. Incidents which the writer would hesitate to include, fearing the accusation of bad art, occur and seem natural enough in the course of our existence. Billy went back with me. I placed him in a chair, put out the lamp, leaving the room lighted only by the fire, and then I said, "Billy, I have something to tell you."

I kept back nothing, knowing his faithfulness and devotion for me, and yet not knowing it, from my first meeting with Marguerite to the time when I discovered that she worked no longer in the drapery-store. I told him of the incident upon the bridge, where the electric-cars started for the Park; I confessed that I loved her; I spoke of my sufferings at not seeing her, and my fears lest some evil should have overtaken her. He remained silent, leaning over the fire, with his back towards me. I

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advanced and put my hand upon his shoulder. He shuddered, then looked up. His dark face was ghastly, and his black eyes suggested two pits of ink.

"I wanted to keep it from you," he whispered.

He knew everything. Is there, after all, any greater love than that of man for man? Those keen native eyes had watched me, that native instinct had guessed the truth. While I had been following Marguerite, longing to look at her face, Billy had followed me, desiring to offer his services. So I had told him nothing new. Marguerite did not know that I loved her; but Billy had found it out.

He was trying to tell me something, a tale he had brought with him, but I could not hear, he was incoherent; at the best of times a poor speaker, he was then only muttering, and all I caught were the names O'Brien, Duggan, Jeannie, and the suggestion that these were people caring for Marguerite. He had come that evening to assure himself I had heard nothing, and my story had broken him down. He was too fond of me, his nature was too simple, to keep back the truth, and yet he could not speak it. I knew then that the story of David and Jonathan was true.

"Billy," I said, "is she alive?"

Bending my head, I caught the answer:

"I do not know."

"Can you tell me where she is?"

"Yes"; and then in a whisper, "I have been with her to-day."

Directly Billy had spoken, it came to my mind he was a medical student.

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"Take me now, Billy," I said; and he got up at once, still keeping his back towards me, and drew his coat on.

I closed and locked the door, we descended the ladder, reached the wet ground, both of us thankful for the darkness, and silent until the road was near, and we could see the dull light of a waiting horse-car.

"Tell me one thing," I said, astonished to find myself speaking so easily, though I was horribly cold and my skin crept. "I have made no mistake? She is good?"

"Yes," he muttered.

"Billy," I whispered, coming up to him, remembering the awful creature with her on the bridge. "Don't say there has been foul play?"

He said nothing, but went on faster, as if he was afraid of me. I caught his arm as he stepped upon the road, and almost wrestled with him while I kept on saying, in response to his broken words, "What, Billy? What?" as the car rumbled towards us, until the heavens seemed to fall upon me with the knowledge that my sweet Marguerite had been frightened, and been ruined—by force.

There is no hiatus in my memory here, everything stands out clearly. I even remember slipping as I got upon the car, and scraping some skin off my leg, and wondering why there was no pain. I remember the attitude of the driver and the leer of the nigger conductor. Don't put your fingers to your ears, listener. It is all simple and natural now to the end, a very old story. I ought to be ashamed to tell it, for you will find the same thing in your

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newspaper every week; but it seemed to me then as if it had never happened before. The light in the car was dim. Billy sat opposite me, staring straight ahead with his faithful black eyes, which avoided mine, and presently I saw something bright upon his cheek, something which caught the lamp-light, a small thing rather like a pearl, until it ran down his face and disappeared; and then I knew it was only a tear, a common thing in this world.

We reached the city. I could see Billy's lips counting the side-streets, and I could tell by his face when we were nearing the one which we were to enter. Leaving the car, we passed along in silence, went by three turnings; at the fourth, Billy seized my arm and begged me to have a drink, a good drink. I shook my head and entered the street. I have never visited it since. I expect it has long ago been destroyed. I shall never know whether there really was a cold mist along it that night. There were only two or three lights, it was a little-used street, half in ruins, composed of dilapidated wooden warehouses, the roadway made out of big planks sunk in the centre, very much broken, with grass and fungi sprouting between the planks, the sort of place where the submerged would come to die.

Beside the entrance to one of these warehouses Billy stopped and drew out a box of matches, lighted one, and showed me a broken flight of steps. There was no door to the place. He felt for my hand, we passed up the stairs like two children, entered a great mouldy passage, tramped along it to a door ajar, and Billy knocked. It was opened

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at once. I saw a huge room, really a section of the disused warehouse which these poor folk were allowed to live in, two hungry, bearded men, a table and couple of chairs of the commonest kind, a bed placed at a curious angle to avoid drippings from the roof, a cooking-range, some crockery and necessary utensils, a heap of medical text-books, several without bindings, and a lamp. With the exception of a box, which contained, I presume, a few odds and ends of clothing, that was all. No cover for the floor, which everywhere gaped in holes; much of the plaster had fallen; the window contained as much paper as glass. My brain seemed unusually active; I took in everything at a glance. I wanted Marguerite, and so I searched for her. I wanted to find her, and gather her like a flower from that dust-heap, take her away, and wear her next to my heart. She had done no wrong. She was as pure as the lily of the valley. Was she to be condemned because those foul streets had risen up and wiped themselves upon her?

Billy was whispering to the two men, O'Brien and Duggan, and soon they turned and wrung me by the hand. This is a record of human weakness, not of heroism, and yet there was something here deserving of honour far more than the hot-blooded action of rescuing a comrade from the field of battle; for these Irishmen were heroes, men no longer young as students go, who had left their own poor country to make a living elsewhere, and now, penniless or nearly so, were working day and night to qualify themselves for doctors, living on bread and water, spending their vacation toiling as agricultural

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labourers, and, with the little money thus saved, struggling through term-time. This is not the side of human endurance which is honoured or heard of, but there is greatness in it.

"Mind the floor, it is full of holes," said one of them. "We shall be better off some day."

They offered me one of the chairs, but I could not sit. I stood, grasping the back of it, staring at Billy, until he came to my side and whispered:

"Wait a bit. She is better, a little brighter."

"Where is she?" I asked.

"In the room opposite."

"Is it like this?"

"Better, the rain does not get in."

"What can I do? I must do something for her, at once."

"Wait, wait," he pleaded. "She is brighter."

In his anxiety for me, Billy spoke aloud, and I saw the two noble Irishmen look at me, then lower their heads, and one of them covered his eyes. Those grave, hungry faces were trying to keep from me what this improvement meant, how that it was the one thing they dreaded, because it was the last effort of nature against death, the final flickering of life, the farewell to the world; and I would not know it, for I dared not, and was full of foolish joy to think that Marguerite, mine now, was soon going to be well. I forced a questioning hand into my pocket, and the touch of paper-money answered it. A thrill of happiness passed through me. To-morrow a well-warmed ambulance should drive along that street, there would be a private ward made ready in the hospital, the most skilful

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doctor in the city should be in attendance; and I could call each day with flowers, and leave messages, for Marguerite. The mouldy warehouse seemed to become green, and to bring forth an orange-tree covered with flowers which would not become fruit, because the sweet blooms would be wanted for Marguerite.

The others were listening; the Irishmen glanced up often at the door, as if they expected it to open. Billy stood not a yard away, never taking his eyes off me; I could hear the sound of his breathing, and saw one of his hands clasping and unclasping, as if he was taking hold of hope and letting it go again. I perceived that he was suffering, and grew a little impatient, for what right had he to be distressed when the crisis was past? "To-morrow," I said to myself, "I shall see Marguerite. I shall hold her hand. I shall look into her eyes at last."

I was not aware that the door had opened until I heard a new voice. A woman was standing in the room; to me, a boy, she looked elderly, and she stooped a little, out of sorrow and hard living, but she could not have been more than thirty; nor does my memory contradict me when I write her down handsome, rather tall, black-haired, with an artificial red rose fastened in her hair. She was speaking very distinctly:

"I'd be so thankful if one of you boys would go out and try to get her an orange. She can't take anything, but this last minute she has set her mind on an orange."

She was holding out her hand, and lying upon the palm I saw the smallest silver coin of the country;

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I saw it because I had come forward. My nervousness was forgotten. Marguerite was near, telling me she wanted an orange, accepting me at last, making me of use, sending me out to do her a service. The good Irishmen held back, recognising that the duty was mine, that the mission was a sacred one, seeing the foolish knight about to set forth for the last deed of chivalry, accompanied by his faithful squire, to accomplish something at last, not to tilt at the trees of the Park, nor to fight with fire-flies, but to find a golden orange for Dulcinea, the lady of the city and the bride of his imagination.

I heard the students muttering, I heard the woman's voice and the words she sent after me, "You're a good sort, Englishman." I saw a door half-open, *that* door, and a light, but heard no murmur, nor a moan. Marguerite was lying there with her eyes open, perhaps gazing at the wall which separated us, waiting for me to bring her an orange. I could not stay for Billy to strike matches, but hurried on, stumbled over the broken boards, and struck my head against the rotten plaster. That little mouth would be very parched: I could not keep it waiting.

Soon we were hastening through the glittering night of stars towards the main street, where I remembered a fruit-store kept by an old Hebrew, whom Billy and I had often persecuted on those nights of folly when we had gone home shouting. I think we said nothing then, for I was frightened lest the mission should be a failure, although there was no need for fear: the old Jew kept his store open till midnight and he had plenty of oranges. I chose

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a dozen of the best, and started to return, half-running with the great bagful, Billy pleading for permission to carry them in vain, because I could not trust even my faithful friend to carry oranges to Marguerite.

By this time I was excited, wildly so, and happy: as we hurried on I chattered about my life ahead, our life: I turned over the leaf and read out the next chapter, and went on, not to the end, for that does not exist when one is twenty-two, but to that state of being which endures for ever and ever.

"I don't care what people say, Billy. The English residents will be down on me. I shall have to chuck the office and start at something else. But when Marguerite is mine, ah then, Billy, I can do anything. It may be uphill work at first, but she will be with me. I may have to give up a few luxuries, but she won't mind. A young couple often have to start like that. To-morrow I must take her away."

"Where can you take her?" Billy muttered. He seemed anxious to speak, eager no doubt to keep the truth from me, but his tongue faltered. Next day I realised it, but not then.

"The hospital," I said.

A few moments later an orange fell from the bag and rolled in the mud. Billy had been saying something. They would not receive Marguerite at the hospital; there was an excuse made upon such occasions, when a girl had gone wrong as it was called, even when she was in peril of child-birth: they had no room, her friends must look after her: if she had none it was a pity, but they would be unwilling to think that. The city was governed by

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very righteous men, as holy as those chief priests and elders who once shouted, "Crucify Him," and Marguerite would have died upon the streets, had it not been for Jeannie the harlot and the two penniless Irish students. Remember all this happened in a half-civilised city twenty years ago. Let us hope it is less righteous now.

Billy picked up the orange and walked on, his stick in one hand, the golden orb in the other. At any other time he might have looked grotesque. I said no more, but my mind was made up. I could see my own little home as a hospital: it would mean leaving the office, looking the other way when acquaintances passed, but what of that? I should have Marguerite, and I should still have friends, the best in the world, those who had taken Marguerite in, cared for her and saved her life, those who had starved themselves when already starving to give her food, those who loved her because she was good and beautiful and had done no sin. I should be base indeed if I did not love those friends, Billy who would have given his life for me, the two noble Irishmen, and the virtuous woman "who was an harlot."

Only the message remains. Back again in the warehouse we found the students drinking weak tea. One of them took my oranges: I parted from them unwillingly, for I was bold then and wanted to go to the door and present them myself, but I could not insist when the Irishman said: "She might hear your voice. Strangers terrify her."

They were cruel words, if true enough, and meant

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to be kind. I was a stranger to Marguerite: for all she knew those oranges were sent her by some careless man of the world, with just sufficient charity in him to be sorry that a pretty girl of nineteen was thirsty, as she lay dying on the other side of the passage. To her I was a man. To me she was the woman. But I did not so much mind, because I knew she was getting well; I was going to hold her hand to-morrow; and the day after, or the next if she was not strong enough before, there was another simple old story for her to hear. Was it not strange that I should have thought of orange-blossom in connection with Marguerite and how lovely she would look as a bride, and that my only gift to her should have been the fruit?

The Irishman came back. I could hardly see his face, and I felt somehow afraid of him, so I touched Billy and whispered: "Ask him."

"Oh, much the same," came the answer. "A little weaker perhaps."

"Holding her own," said his comrade cheerily. "She'll pull through."

Kind words these, meant for me, not for the angel who records falsehoods. Had I been able to see their faces clearly, or to reason at all, I should have known that Marguerite was much weaker, and I should have left them and gone out into the night to hide myself, followed, always followed, by my faithful friend, through the floods, the mud, and the tangled bush—all that was to come.

The door was more than half-open, and had been left so purposely in order that the men might hear a call. I was looking in that direction when the

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boards creaked and Jeannie appeared, looking tired I fancied, and older, as if a year or two had passed since her last entry.

"Maggie thanks you. She asked me to come and thank you. I told her you bought the oranges yourself, and she said: 'He is a kind Englishman.'"

Read that message over again. It is worth it, for the words are Marguerite's. Simple syllables, but they gnaw, they are jagged with sharp teeth; each struck into the heart of a fool, who was not strong enough or courageous enough to take what God sent him; who was too weak and paralysed with self-consciousness to put out his hand and capture the bird of happiness as it fluttered past on its way to horror, despair, and the cold of the grave, if he would not save it; who was doomed to shame and premature death, and what agony besides God knows, because he fought against fate. Marguerite did not know that the man who sent her those oranges, who swore to his friend and his own heart that he loved her, was her murderer: but he knew.

I had lost the sense of time. Perhaps an hour went by, perhaps ten minutes. One of the men, I had not learnt to distinguish them by name, was upon the bed breathing heavily: the other was studying a text-book: while Billy still stood near me, shifting his weight from foot to foot, sometimes gulping noisily. It became no colder, but suddenly we all shuddered and cried out.

A noise in that hitherto silent passage, and Jeannie broke in upon us, screaming and terrified, looking back as though trying to escape from some-

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thing terrible. I alone did not understand. The others knew what it was that had frightened Jeannie out of the room opposite, and pursued her along the passage; who it was that had entered that horrible warehouse with a fearful suddenness, seeking for Marguerite, and had said to that frightened woman in the closing words of the Mass, "Go, it is finished."

"Boys, boys!" she screamed. "Oh Maggie, Maggie!"

It is easy to see them: Jeannie leaning against the table, panting; one of the men standing, his body slightly inclined towards the door; the other sitting upright on the bed: but the three faces are blurred. Billy had his arm round my neck.

They are coming out of church. I am glad we were not close enough to hear the evening hymn. The light has left the primroses, you see, and all the lane is in darkness, but only for a little. There's the brightness of the dawn to come. That shadow, which seems to be a part of the darkness, but is really quite distinct, you understand, listener, because you have one too, that will not disappear at daybreak. It is made of the same stuff as our lives, and dies only with us. But it is cold here, very cold, and the sea is roaring like a storm, the same sea which separates me from the land of these memories, flinging its tide upward, here under the cliff, and making the shingle creep. We will go no further together. I told you it was a very simple story.

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IV

A REMINISCENCE CONCERNING A MAN

It was near sunset when I rattled off the smooth trail of the north-western prairie, and drove my buggy into Nepinka, along the main, and indeed the only, street which had just been ploughed up. Having registered at the only hotel the place possessed, I ordered the inevitable supper of beefsteak and fried potatoes, and employed the interval by looking out of the dirty window of my bedroom and summing up the few men who drifted past. There wasn't much variety; but presently a loaded waggon came along drawn by a team of tugging and snorting oxen, the wheels sinking into the black soil, the driver, a typical old-timer, perched upon the spring seat, chewing his tobacco and goading on the animals by impartial applications of a long hay-fork which he held instead of reins, and with hoarse shouts of "haw" and "gee."

Almost opposite my window the waggon heaved like some old ship on a wave, one of the wheels plunged heavily into mire, while the oxen, recognising disaster, and being always as ready to refrain from labour as any nigger in a cotton-

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field, stood stock still and closed their eyes in an irritating fashion. The waggon was evidently stuck, and though the farmer used his fork vigorously, and encouraged his animals with bright language of the West, the *status quo* was maintained. Indeed, it was soon aggravated; for one of the oxen, perceiving that here was an opportunity which might not occur again for several hours, lowered itself grunting, and settled its body in the dirt, with that bovine complacency which makes men blasphemous.

The farmer descended and kicked the fallen animal. The ox did not appear to mind, probably it was well accustomed to such treatment, and had long ago come to the conclusion that it amused the master; it did not even open its eyes; and presently its comrade, noticing an example worthy of imitation, also assumed a recumbent position and made the problem a tangled one.

While I was chuckling over the hayseed's dilemma, I heard the sound of footsteps upon the wooden sidewalk; and then a voice calling derisively: "Say, Peters! It's good to see a fellow having a tussle with oxen. Why don't you go and sit on their heads?"

The farmer turned, scratching his shaggy beard, trying to growl and grin at the same moment, and I heard him answer:

"I might reckon you'd been born for some purpose, if you came right here and gave me a hand, instead of standing there pulling faces. I've got ten miles to cover to-night, and these gol-darned oxen have planted themselves as solid as rocks."

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The other laughed: the next moment he appeared on the road and I had a good view of him.

An Englishman, of course, his voice had told me that, but I was a bit startled, for one does not run up against a young fellow with the figure of a Greek statue every journey. He was a glorious creature physically, just the right height, supple, made one might have thought as a model of what men ought to be: his face, just then a trifle dirty, had every feature moulded to perfection, his hair of a dark-golden tint was long, and dropped in curls over his ears in true Western fashion. His figure matched well with his clothes, which consisted of knee-boots, cord breeches, and a flaming shirt, open at the throat. I could see he was of gentle birth, I began to wonder what indiscretion had led to his expulsion from the home circle, and I thought to myself: some girl has got a heart aching for him—or she will have.

"Well, Peters," I heard him say with a most affected drawl, "I guess it's a case of unloading before you can pull out. I'll help if you stand a drink."

"All you Englishmen are good for," growled the farmer. "You can't get enough whisky in your native land, so you come out here and drink ours."

"There go some of the boys," said the other, putting his fingers into his mouth and whistling. "We'll have you out of this in ten minutes."

Before I went down to supper the waggon was released and had creaked away homewards, Peters the poorer by a dollar, which he had sunk in drinks for the crowd of thirsty helpers.

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My meal over, I sauntered off in the direction of the bar-room at the back of the hotel. As it was my first visit to this little prairie village, which was very great in its own sight, and had adopted the courtesy title of city after the custom of such settlements, I desired to become acquainted with the gentry of the neighbourhood: for the saloon of western civilisation takes the place of the English club. There is rarely more than one in a very small city, such as Nepinka, which only consisted of a single street not much more than fifty yards in length, but here at the close of day most of the men in the place may be found. The stranger, therefore, who wishes to present himself to society, must appear in the saloon at evening and invite the citizens to join him in a drink. This friendly act will be held as a sufficient introduction, and the newcomer will be regarded immediately as a man of sterling character qualified to give an opinion upon municipal affairs.

Little Nepinka presented after dark a desolate appearance: the few stores closed and gloomy; the scattered log or frame houses blackly outlined against the sky with hardly a light showing; the narrow sidewalk given over to a yapping dog and a few adventurous frogs; mosquitoes hovering in the air and occasionally a firefly like a star. But there was one bright patch of light, one centre from which proceeded all the voices and feeling of the town: it was the saloon. As the night advanced, figures would appear by ones or twos, sometimes by threes, the outside figures supporting a tottering central

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one: some would grope towards trees or hitching-posts, where horses were patiently waiting: there would follow the exclamation, "Get up there," wheels rattling upon the trails or horseshoes stamping, last shouts would be exchanged, and all sound would finally die away as the farmers made for home.

Although it was still early in the evening when I entered the bar-room, a considerable number had assembled. My steps had been guided by the tinkling of a banjo. I guessed what the player was like and was not disappointed, for directly I crossed the threshold I discovered my young countryman sitting happily upon a barrel, trying to strum the music of a plantation song. Very handsome he looked, with a big hat stuck on the back of his curly head, his boyish face, which had been washed since I saw him last, too highly flushed with heat, perhaps with liquor. His merry eyes caught mine at once; but he never stopped his tinkling, and presently his pleasant voice rang out:

"Oh, have you seen my Dinah,
A walkin' up this way?
You couldn't fail to notice her—
She's pretty as the day,
Her hair is black and flying loose,
Her eyes are like two stars.
Then, nigger, tell me truly,
Have you seen her pass this way?"

"Chorus, boys!" he cried, and I found myself joining in the jingling melody that poured forth lustily from every throat—

"Oh, then have you seen my Dinah?"

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This little concert over, I stepped forward and exclaimed heartily, "Good evening, gentlemen."

"Evening, stranger," came the reply.

Following custom I stepped up to the bar, and ordered "Drinks for the crowd."

"That's good business. I'm as dry as a mummy," exclaimed the banjoist, jumping from his barrel.

I looked at the handsome, eager face near me. If he had parents, what did they mean by letting the boy, who should have been the pride of their hearts, come out and loaf in this half-civilised place and stand the risk of going to pieces?

The men gathered round readily enough, and tongues began to wag while the glasses clinked. Among some farmers who had lately entered, I presently noticed a former acquaintance, who spotted me and came up with the salutation:

"Hello, T——. How's yourself?"

"Good enough," I replied. "What may you be doing round here?"

"Taken a farm," he said proudly. "Twenty-five acres under crop the second year."

"Not bad for a loafer," I said. "How's the corn looking?"

"The best in the world."

"It's been good growing weather."

The remark seemed to excite him. "Good growing weather! Well, I should snigger! I tell you, sir, the way the wheat has been coming along this last week is ridiculous. Yes, sir, it's ridiculous."

I leant over and whispered: "Who's the young chap—the one with the banjo?"

"A young blood. Percival they call him. Hangs

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around the place doing nothing all day. He's popular with the boys and a good poker player. Nice-looking, ain't he? A bit girlish in the face, though."

It was not long before young Percival and I came together. In that crowded bar-room we couldn't talk much; so when the crowd began to thin off I invited him to help himself to a cigar and come for a stroll outside.

"I promised to make up a poker four, but I don't want to. Wait here a minute. I'll go round and tell the boys I can't come."

He made off, while I joined my agricultural friend, who was holding forth to a few sympathetic listeners upon the foolishness of the Government in attempting to prohibit the sale of intoxicating liquors in the Territories.

"I'm a man that's fond of a glass, and I'll not deny it," he was saying, as I came up. "But as for these politicians declaring that a countryful of civilised beings shan't drink what they want to, it's ridiculous. Yes, sir, it's ridiculous."

"Wouldn't be the place for you?" suggested one of the listeners.

"I like a square drink. 'Tis no use denying it; but I know when it's time to go home. I was only drunk once in my life, and that was in the Territories."

"Tell us," I said.

"This way. I went up to Troy after some stock, and as I was sitting in the hotel first evening, a fellow there started talking and said it was a darned shame they couldn't get their drinks fair

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and above-board, instead of smuggling the stuff in under the name of doctor's medicine. Perhaps you won't believe me, but it's a fact; directly he started I felt a thirst creeping up my neck and coming along my tongue. So I spoke up and told this chap I agreed with him, and mentioned how I felt like opening my lips to something satisfactory. 'You'll have more than a little trouble to get it. The police are on the sharp look-out,' he said. If I'd only wanted a drink before, I was crazy for one then. So I went off to the proprietor and after a lot of bother got him to bring out his medicine-chest. I can remember, as if 'twas only last night, tumbling outside that hotel and falling across the sidewalk. That's the only time I ever carried an over-charge. It's the rottenest law ever made. Any child could tell you that a man doesn't begin to want a thing until other folk have told him he can't have it. These chaps in Parliament ain't supposed to have brains, anyway."

"Did ye ever hear tell how old Major Fisher got round 'em all?" enquired a big man, who had not taken any part in the conversation hitherto.

We shifted round this new centre of attraction: so he pulled his pipe from the tangle of hair surrounding his mouth and continued:

"The major applied for a permit to ship across some liquor for his own use. The Commissioner, who had a bit of a grudge against him, wanted to refuse outright, but didn't quite see his way. So he sent a permit for one bottle of spirit, laughing to himself, and reckoning he'd got even with the

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old man. I don't know what he'd have said if he'd seen the major laugh too, as he did when he read the permit. Anyway the Commissioner's grin had a new shape when a Central Pacific freight-truck brought along the biggest bottle in the world. When it came the major set it up in a barn near his house. It stood over fifteen feet high, they say, and was full to the neck. The Commissioner was mad. Went round storming at Fisher. The old man pulled out the permit and showed it, as cold as an eel all the time. 'One bottle you said, and never a word about the size. One bottle is all I've got, as you can see for yourself.' The Commissioner hadn't got a squeak left."

I moved off, expecting to find Percival waiting. At the door I was joined by my irrepressible friend, the farmer, who remarked:

"You must come over and pick a duck some evening. The farm lies south of a big slough what's always crawling with fowl, and I've only to stick a gun to my shoulder and let her go to bring down a few."

"All right," I said, "I'll come one time. You've got a fine night for a ride."

"I have so," he replied, casting his head back and staring skyward. "Fact is I've been studying astrology lately. Found an old book lying around, got a few hints out of that, and relied upon my intelligence for the rest. A man don't know what his brains are like till he starts to look for 'em. This here astrology gives me a lot to think about as I drive across prairie."

"What's that star?" I asked, as innocently as

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I could, pointing to a glittering orb in the centre of the sky.

My astronomical friend perked his head to one side, examined the bright point of light critically, and finally decided, "Well, I guess that star would be something like Jumpiter."

Percival reached us in time to hear this, and his clear boyish laughter rang out into the night.

"Pretty good, Roger," he said. "I wish I knew half as much about the sciences as you do."

"I'd be sorry if you set up your education against mine," said my delightful friend. "You young English chaps have a notion you know things. Fact is us farmers have the brains these days. Do you know the name of that star, now?" he added, pointing most blankly at a whole constellation.

"I'd be grateful if you told me," said young Percival.

"Well, sir, the name of that there star is Satan. And that one, him a twinkling over old man Robert's shanty," he continued, with increasing audacity, "well now his name has slipped just now; but I know 'tis something to do with a thermometer."

Well pleased with himself, the farmer made off towards a black poplar where his horse was tethered, while Percival turned to me, changed his manner completely, and said: "He must have meant Mercury, a planet not even visible. Old Roger hasn't yet learnt the danger of tasting the Pierian spring."

I glanced at him narrowly. "It sounds strange to hear you talk like that after the bar-room."

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"I must pull myself to your level now," he said.

We went out, passing the silent stores, and had nothing much to say until we had left the sidewalk and reached the hard trail, where white owls were drifting to and fro.

"Why did I come out?" said the boy, repeating my question. "Give me a light and I'll tell."

I did as he asked, muttering something about smoking too much. The spluttering match spread a yellow patch around us.

"There was a fellow here not long ago. He wanted to know what had brought me here. I told him part of the truth, and he said, 'I guess you're a darned young fool.' Perhaps you'll do the same."

"I'll try and be more complimentary."

He laughed. "Don't trouble. My hide is getting tough. How long is it since you last saw London?"

"About five years."

"Lord! that's an age. I've hardly been out twelve months. It's more like twelve years."

"A week is a long time when we are separated from a certain person," I said, at a venture.

He looked up eagerly, and I could see the glitter in his eyes.

"What made you say that?"

"Experience."

"You're right. I'll tell you a little more."

I dodged a big frog which squatted in my line of march.

"I am glad to see you," he said impulsively. "The Nepinka boys are all right, thorough good chaps, but they are no good to me when the horrors

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come on. I have to go away into my room and kick the wall and bite myself. You and I are of the same breed. We are both broken-down English gentlemen," he laughed. "We must be, or we shouldn't be here—never mind my insults. My father is one of the old brigade, head of a county family, a retired officer, squire, and magistrate, all that sort of rot. He's got a notion that his only son ought to be brought up to the same ideas."

"And you had some of your own?"

"I expect. At school I was a bit wild, and I won't deny it. Merely the working off of superfluous animal spirits I called it; but the governor lectured on insubordination and the wickedness of refusing to submit to wholesome discipline. Then I went up to Oxford, got among a set who had no use for lectures or regulations, and was rusticated in my first year. Then the pater got mad, stuck his crest up and swore, and finally decided to send me out here to rough it for three years."

"How about your mother?"

"Oh, she howled. But she's not the commander-in-chief of my family. The old man can be very decent when he likes; unfortunately he can't forget he's an officer and a gentleman, and as an officer he likes to run the universe, and as a gentleman he's got too many ideas. You see he knocked about the world a lot in his young days, and he thinks the rough life did him no end of good. So he reckoned a dose of hard living would be the right thing for me. There was something else though. He was after an excuse to get me away."

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"Well?" I said, when he paused and began to kick holes in the turf.

"Use your experience," he answered.

"A village girl?" I suggested.

"Not quite—in fact you're a long way off. This," he said, unfastening his coat, diving a hand into the breast-pocket, and bringing out an envelope. He passed a photograph to me, then struck a match, making a lantern of his hands. I daresay my own were shaking a little, for I was not so very much older than Percival and had memories of my own. It was a pretty picture, a clean and holy one, and it brought back the idle days in English gardens and many lost opportunities. I saw the smiling face of a merry-looking girl, such a happy face—but it was years ago. There must have been a change since then.

"You are the only one I have shown it to this side," said a jealous voice at my side.

"It's a story we all know something about," I answered, handing back his treasure.

"Well, it's beastly new as far as I'm concerned," he said, almost sulkily, and when we walked on he became silent.

"I don't know yet which way I'm to look at it," I said at length.

"In other words you don't think much of my character. You're not to blame," he went on hurriedly, when I was about to speak. "You've only seen me in the bar."

"You hope to marry that girl?"

"Eh, it's my dream," he said; and though I

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could not see his face, I was sure his eyes were dim, for the tell-tale voice was broken.

"She came as governess to my two kid sisters. I fell in love with her, and she with me. Of course she's a lady, daughter of a clergyman who is dead, without a penny. So she is a nobody, and that's the reason why the governor wanted to ship me off."

"The old wretched mistake," I said with warmth.

"You think so? I'll tell you what he said before I left. 'If I send you west, with just enough money to live on, to rough it for three years, you may perhaps return with a head upon your shoulders. In that case I shall be glad to receive you as my son and heir. I want a gentleman and a rational being to sit in my chair when I'm gone, not a profligate and a spendthrift.'"

I made a remark, which Percival had every right to ignore.

"What he might have said was this, 'During those three years you may forget about Miss Nobody, and when you come home I can see you married to some damned doll with a bank account.'"

"You have been out a year?" I remarked somewhat irrelevantly.

"As for forgetting Amy—well, sometimes I wish I could. At the end of the three years I shall go back to her, and father can do what he likes."

"What brought you to this particular settlement?"

"I came to learn farming, as it is called. A farmer near here engaged to teach me for a pretty big premium. But of all the frauds that's the worst."

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"More work than teaching?" I suggested.

"It's wicked. Fancy paying a big premium for the privilege of working long hours as an ordinary labourer. You might as well expect a navvy in the old country to pay a premium for being allowed to smash stones."

"How long did you stay?"

"Arrived Tuesday afternoon 3.30 p.m. Left Thursday morning 8 a.m. Directly I got there, he told me to change my 'dudish clothes' and feed the pigs. The novelty was so lovely that I was glad to obey. Then he set me to clean out the cow byre, and used some language because I couldn't milk. I was perfectly willing to learn, but he refused to let me experiment upon his cows. I didn't get to bed until late, and was so done I couldn't unpack anything. The brute had me up before six next morning, and after I had fed the stock he sent me across prairie with a load of hay for a farmer fifteen miles distant. He put me on the trail, which was straight all the way, so I couldn't conveniently lose myself. I made an all-day job of this: so when I returned got sworn at again. After I had finished work that night, I began to feel the novelty wearing a bit thin, so I privately determined to have my innings. In the morning, or what seemed to me the middle of the night, after breakfast by lamplight, he took me out to a dung pile and informed me I was to spend the day carting it to a field close by. I assured him I hadn't the least intention of obeying. Thereupon he said he'd make me. I showed him a trick I had acquired in the gymnasium at school, and walked off, after

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adding him to the dung pile. The man was an Englishman, I'm sorry to say. He had been an ordinary labourer in the old country, and I suppose he was charmed at the idea of having a gentleman for a slave. After that I came to the hotel here as a remittance man, with enough to live on, but not enough to get away."

"And pretty slow you must find it."

"Rather. It's the winter that's so infernal."

"Why don't you get hold of some work? It would help to pass the time."

"I hate this slaving on a farm and living in filth, and that's the only work to be had unless I join the police, which would mean binding myself for years. I don't really need to do anything. The governor allows me forty dollars a month. Most of it goes in board and lodging, and as for the rest—well, I hardly know myself where it does go to."

"The bar?"

He laughed. "Something that way, I suppose."

We turned to go back towards the tiny city which was then invisible. I was beginning to wonder what sort of a gentleman my companion would be when he returned. His sojourn in the west would probably give him a fairly extensive vocabulary of bad language, sow the seeds of inveterate indolence, and provide him with a well-developed craving for liquor. Would his father recognise any of these things as improvements?

"What are you going to say?" Percival asked presently. "You haven't called me a young fool yet."

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"You will pardon my plain speaking," I said. "I rather think the fool in your case is an old one."

I heard him whistle softly: then he flung down the stub of his cigar and crushed it beneath his boot.

"You think that. Well, I've had the same sort of idea myself."

As we walked back the boy took my arm and clung to it like a girl, talking eagerly of what was likely to happen when he had served his sentence of exile. His mother, needless to say, was entirely on his side. Percival proposed fighting "the governor and a gang of old aunts"; hitherto he had submitted, but at the end of the three years he would be of an age to speak for himself, and as he was the only son it seemed to him the father must yield. "I expect the old man is a bit of a bully," he said. "He'll climb down if I threaten to shoot. In any case I shall marry Amy, and if she can't soften him, when she bears the name he's so confoundedly proud of, I shall conclude he's hopeless and leave him to go on his pig-headed way alone. Directly I see him I shall say, "Father, I've come back with a head on my shoulders, and I should like your blessing on my marriage which is to take place next month, *patre volente* or anyhow. Do you think he will give it, Mr. T——?"

"I don't know your father," I answered.

"Well, what are you going to say to me?"

"Don't lose the girl," I said. "Take your happiness for heaven's sake."

He squeezed my arm. We walked on in the ghostly company of moths and owls, the surrounding

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prairie noisy with the incessant chorus of its nightingales the frogs. When we reached the hotel Percival took both my hands, wrung them, and " for her sake " implored me to stay in Nepinka as long as I could " to keep me straight."

As I was dressing the following morning I heard sounds I could not fail to recognise, and perceived my young friend marching down the centre of the road, strumming light-heartedly on his banjo and shouting chaff at every individual he met. Presently he encountered the blacksmith of the settlement, and I was witness of the following:

" Well, Strachan, you're just the fellow I wanted to see. I'll toss you for the morning drink."

The man grinned, a huge hand disappeared into his breeches pocket, soon to reappear clutching a coin, which he wafted aloft with a strong flip of his thumb.

" It's against you," cried Percival as they bent together. " I've got a drink out of you at last, Strachan."

This was the same young man who had been so earnest at midnight. As I finished dressing I made a few comments concerning parents who send youngsters fresh from school out to a rough land to get their characters formed. What is to be expected of a boy, kept under restraint at home, then suddenly emancipated and placed in the midst of a host of evil influences which are entirely novel and not altogether unpleasing. If he disgraces his name, is he so much to blame ?

Had it not been for the insubordination of Chief Yellow Quill, this story would not have been written,

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or it would at least have ended here so far as I was concerned. During the following January it so happened that the chief began to consider himself a person of consequence and to act as such. To quell any further signs of vanity on his part, I was ordered by the Indian department to go up to the reserve, which was close to Nepinka. So on a bitterly cold day my cutter glided to the door of the unpretentious hotel, where I had spent a few days in the early summer, and one of the first persons I met was Percival himself. He greeted me hilariously, and dragged me off to have something to drive out the chill.

He was the same fine creature, his manner as pleasing as ever; but I soon discovered an alteration: thick accents of voice, a heaviness in his bright eyes, nervous excitability, many other little things which showed me that his character was being formed—scarcely in a manner which would bring much satisfaction to his father.

Hours rather than days sufficed to bring my work to a conclusion and the refractory chief to what few senses he possessed. I was unable to make any lengthy stay in Nepinka, but before leaving I had resolved upon having a serious talk with young Percival to see if I could not influence him towards a much-needed reformation. But this interview was never to take place.

The day before my arranged departure commenced, so far as weather was concerned, like most other days in the heart of winter; but at noon the feeble sun became choked up in a grey mass of rolling cloud, through which it glowed as a blood-

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red ball before being entirely blotted out. The clouds drifted more thickly, pressed down closer, while the silence grew greater every minute, not a bird appeared on the snow-clad plains, not an insect in the biting air. I met Strachan, the blacksmith, on the sidewalk, muffled up to the eyes: I asked what he thought of the weather.

"I guess we'd best get indoors and pile up the stoves," he replied, his voice rolling into the intense silence, and his breath gathering in fine frost upon his beard.

"It's a blizzard, then?"

"That's so, and a corker," he said, moving on in his noiseless felt boots, for it was too cold to stand.

Half an hour later the gloom had increased and the silence became broken. Looking from the doorway—the double windows were thickly sheeted with ice—I saw little spiral flurries of snow-crystals rising up from the road, travelling a few yards, then vanishing, while others would rise to preserve the continuity. Gazing along a neighbouring trail, I watched these spiral columns made of snow-dust, sweeping over the prairie like an advancing army of northern spirits. Sometimes they would all be wiped out in a moment, as suddenly spring from the ground with deliberate revolutions, then speed along, always whirling, their ghostly raiment flying and wreathing round them. I noticed also that the undefined cloud masses were gradually falling, pressing down upon the few scattered houses, while indistinct shadows crossed between earth and sky. Presently a low moaning, something like an animal

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in distress, rose apparently from the back of the houses opposite. Then, before I could stir or draw another breath, came a rushing and a shriek, a thong of ice-crystals lashed me across the face, and pandemonium reigned supreme. The wind howled, woodwork creaked, and strange noises were at work in every corner. The snow darted from the ground and entered the wind, forming an impermeable curtain, through which no eye could penetrate. Earth, sky, and atmosphere wore the same appearance of a grey, raging whirlpool of blinding snow.

I had fallen back into the hall, half blinded, my face smarting in a dozen places, while the outer door slammed violently at the first onslaught. As I was rubbing my tingling features, Percival descended the stairs leisurely. The wind had swept some snow-dust beneath the inner door, and little eddies were whirling in a kind of exaggerated morris-dance round and round on the oil-cloth.

"I should have shut the door if I'd been you. There's lots of snow outside without letting any of it in here."

"I was just going to," I explained. "The blizzard caught me, and nearly cut my face in pieces."

He closed the door, yawned, and stretched his limbs.

"I've been asleep most of the afternoon, until this racket stirred me. What could you imagine more infernal! Come round to the bar, and let's get drunk. It's the only thing to do in this ice hole."

I followed him, weakly perhaps, but it was im-

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possible to refuse without treading custom underfoot, and that was hardly a fitting time to try and shout a lecture at the boy.

A few men of the unwilling-to-work brigade were in the bar-room, yelling in each other's ears, for some iron roofing had been loosened by the storm and was rattling like a thousand kettledrums. We joined them and commenced to waste the evening in the usual way. Now and again there would be a rush to the door, a noisy scuffling, a miniature tempest of wind and fine snow: a caricature of Santa Claus would follow, beard and eyebrows icebound, and crystals all over his furs. Naturally the citizens chose the warmth and stimulants of the bar on such an evening, even if there was a chance of finding everything in their homes hopelessly frozen on their return.

I suppose about an hour had gone. I know I was thinking of supper, though it could not have been six o'clock. In the middle of the blizzard time was of little account. It might have been midnight. Percival had drifted away to join Strachan, who was a hard drinker. I could see that both were getting on too fast, and I cast about for some method to get the boy away with me. While thinking out a plan, there came one of those curious lulls that so often occur when a blizzard is at its height, and during the comparative quiet I heard feeble scratchings and knockings against the door, as if some animal was mutely asking for shelter. I turned to the door and opened it. The wind swept in, making the lamp-flames dart in the glasses, and with the wind came a kind of monster, which fell

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into the room and lay helplessly grovelling upon the floor.

I slammed the door with an effort, while fear became visible upon every face.

"It's a bear," cried one of the men.

The figure raised a shaggy human head, and struggled to speak.

"Why, it's old Mose! It's old Mosey Wheale! What's he been up to? Here, lend a hand, and let's put him by the stove."

Plenty of such remarks flew about the room, while as many willing hands helped the old man to his feet. He was a dreadful sight. His face had been torn in a score of places, and the blood had frozen in ugly lines. His beard was stiff, like a board, and covered with ice.

"Hold up, Mose, old man," cried Strachan, endeavouring to support the shuddering figure.

"Here—take this down," shouted Percival, stumbling forward with a glass of brandy.

"Hold on there, boys! His face is froze," cried another.

"Then what do you want keeping him in this hot room?" shouted the hotel proprietor. "Do you mean to see him rot away before our eyes? Take him along to the sample-room. It's cold there, for the stove has gone out."

"What's the trouble with him?"

"Trouble! The blizzard caught him in the street, and of course he turned in here."

"How came the blood on his face?"

There was silence.

"Who is he?" I asked Percival, as the proces-

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sion moved off towards the sample-room, or the commercial-room as it would be called in England.

"An old farmer. Lives half a mile from here with his wife. She's a good sort and has been very decent to me."

"He's going to talk."

The old man was fighting for his breath. Another dose of brandy, then his tongue was freed and he managed to make himself heard.

"Boys, I be froze to death."

"No, no. You're all right, Mose."

"Old mother—she be froze."

The crowd pressed forward eagerly.

"Roof blown away. Stove upset."

"He's come all the way from the shanty. How did you get here, Mose?"

"Wire fence. Felt way along."

A big sigh went round the cold room which was cloudy with white breath. The blizzard had wrecked the shanty, the stove had gone out, that awful temperature was doing its killing work. The old man had guided and dragged himself along by the barbed wire fence. The wind must have hurled him upon the cruel wire every other step, the jagged barbs had torn his face; but he had struggled on, and more by a miracle than his own strength had reached the hotel.

Percival's action woke me up. He snatched the old man's cap and mitts, drew them on, and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" I shouted.

"To save the old woman," he said, in that stub-

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born way of his. The rush of biting wind came again and he was gone.

"The boy's crazy," vociferated Strachan, lurching heavily forward. "Come back, lad. Old mother will be froze solid. Even if she ain't, you can't begin to bring her back."

I sprang for my fur coat and cap, and struggled into them.

"Boys," I cried, "we must go after him."

"See here," shouted the hotel proprietor, running forward as I reached towards the catch of the door, "we're likely to have a few funerals as 'tis. We don't want any more than is necessary. You wait until the blizzard drops a bit, then we'll all get out together."

I made no answer, but, opening the door, plunged into the whirling snow, while Strachan and one other followed.

I knew where the wire fence started, struggled towards it, and more by instinct than anything else stumbled against the corner-post. Here my poor courage failed. I couldn't, I dared not proceed, clutching the barbed strand, for if I relinquished my grasp for a moment I must be lost, and to be lost meant death. An easy, painless death; but I shuddered as I saw in my imagination three stiff bodies laid out in the sample-room I had just quitted. I was half choked by the snow, my face felt as if covered with a red-hot mask, the whirling shapes rushed howling by me, spectral figures beckoning a man on to his doom.

I clung to the invisible post frantically, and when a substantial creature fell over me I clutched at him wildly, and he at me.

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"Who is it?" he yelled, and to my disappointment it was not Percival's voice.

"T——," I yelled back. And then, "Have you found him?"

"Young Percival! No chance of that. We'll have our share of luck if we get back to the hotel."

We linked together and staggered forward, battling with the wind, and after a hard fight of it reached the hotel, which was not more than a hundred yards distant from the post, but on such a night men have been frozen to death within ten yards of their own doorstep.

A melancholy group we made, shivering in the hotel for the next hour. Then the blizzard fell: we crept out in two parties and commenced our search. In a bluff of white poplar near the ruins of the shanty, beneath which old Mrs. Wheale was discovered, enveloped in furs and all manner of other things, buried in snow, not only alive but actually unfrozen—she was an old hand, and knew that her only chance lay in thus entombing herself—we came across a white object, huddled beneath a patch of willow scrub. We lifted the figure out. It was Percival, frozen in a sitting position, his arms clasped round his knees. We carried the body back as we found it, and when the poor boy had been hurriedly stripped, we placed him in a tub of water in the hope of bringing him back to life. I shivered with cold and horror, as I stood uselessly by, my eyes fixed upon that huddled form, which, to use Strachan's expression, was "froze solid into a lump of rock." I was thinking of two people in England, whom I had never seen, and never should see: a

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young, loving, anxious girl, and a stern, misguided fool of a father, waiting, both of them waiting—for this.

There I stood, the coldest man there, until it was triumphantly announced that, fearfully frozen as he was, Percival was still alive.

Some days later, I stood in the waiting-room of a hospital more than two hundred miles from Nepinka: a long journey to take a man in peril of death; but in a big unsettled country small villages and a hospital are far apart. I had come to ask if there was any hope, and I was waiting. Footsteps passed the door repeatedly, and when any seemed to halt outside a thrill went through me, and I nerved myself to hear the worst. Would he recover? That handsome body—would any part be lost? These were the questions I was about to hear answered.

The door opened with a sudden snap, and a doctor entered. He was a small man in spectacles, and as he invaded my solitude he smiled contentedly and rubbed his thin hands together briskly.

"A relative?" he suggested. "A brother?"

"Merely an acquaintance," I answered. "Is it good news?"

"Excellent. The operation has been entirely successful."

"Operation," I gasped.

"It is a surgical triumph," he went on, with enthusiasm. "The limbs were completely frozen and decomposition was spreading rapidly. This has been arrested, and the patient's life has been saved, by judicious amputation."

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I murmured that one word I dreaded more than death after him, in tones of horror.

He smiled at me genially, thinking only of himself, his profession, and progress; nothing at all of a ruined life, or of a father waiting for his son, or of a maid longing for her handsome sweetheart. The operation was a complete success!

"This case will certainly appear in the medical journals. It is most instructive—most helpful. But you must please excuse me, as I have another engagement. Yes, I am coming," he called at the moving door.

"What have you cut off?" I managed to ask.

"The arms, the legs, the nose, and ears. It is indeed a surgical triumph."

He went, and perhaps it was fortunate he did, for my blood was rising, and I could not have stood much more. Had he remained longer I believe I might have taken him by the shoulders and shaken that smile off.

I hung horror-stricken about the place, and at last came across a nurse, a pitiful woman, who told me everything.

"I think you had better not see him," she said. "He's a dreadful sight. I have never known anything like it. They cut off his legs close to the trunk, his arms at the shoulders, the nose, and both ears. He was such a handsome boy, too. He's nothing now but a human bundle, a piece of living, useless flesh."

As I walked away heavily from the hospital, the words of his father were always before me:

"You may perhaps return with a head upon your

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shoulders. In that case I shall be glad to receive you as my son and heir."

There is little more to tell. I knew of an English gentleman returning to the old country, and he was willing to take what was left of Percival home to his relations. On the appointed day we met at the hospital, and the body was carried out to the waiting hack. The gentlemen turned to me with a sad smile.

"I've often been asked to take parcels for friends when I've been crossing. It seems this isn't so very different."

At the last moment I stepped up to say goodbye. The handsome blue eyes were still much the same, and the golden hair dropped over the cavities where the ears had been. Otherwise how awful was the change.

He beckoned me to stoop down, and as I bent my head his voice, in a tremulous whisper, sent a strange question into my ear:

"Mr. T——, do you think she will have me now?"

Some might have smiled: for me there was nothing but pathos, and I turned away, seeing very little of my surroundings. The next moment they were gone.

I never heard of him again: at least I have not up to the present. He may be alive, he may live to a good age. But what a fearful life it must be!

Often of an evening, when I sit by myself, that scene rises up again. I see once more the poor bundle with the wistful pleading eyes, and I hear the whisper telling me how the heart lives and how love

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endures through everything, even when the body has been pruned to the trunk like a tree, how this stubborn life clings to the only thing, to the bodily and spiritual union with another life, which is the one happiness under heaven :

" Mr. T——, do you think she will have me now ? "

She looked a loving, unselfish girl. And yet——!

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V

STUDY OF A FAILURE AT HOME

It was a summer's night. The last of the crowd went rollicking along the Edgware Road, shouting not so much through happiness as custom, and the Bystander went after them homewards. The hoarse shouts died away sadly; the pleasure-seekers were tired, their enjoyment was done; in a few hours they would be astir, depressed in the early light, to seek anew for bread and coppers; there was a final shout lessening into a gasp, the last moan of a concertina and the night went to sleep.

The Bystander walked towards a smoky yellow light, where he could see a grizzled head dodging up and down like a grotesque marionette; he paused by the few tattered moths that had fluttered towards this light.

"Ain't got no tea," replied the proprietor of the stall. "The water don't bile yet." He stroked an urn independently, to test the temperature. "Korfee, Jack, an' a slice o' plain? No," he continued, "tuppence. I ain't goin' to make 'apporths. I can't afford to run no charity restaurant."

"Tuppence takes a deal o' makin' some days;

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'tis a lot o' money to part with for a mug an' a slice."

Jack, the speaker, stood close beside the Bystander, and the latter looked round, because the accent that underlay the talk of London town was not that of the voluntarily unwashed. He saw a thin man, in a vesture of rags held together with mathematical preciseness by scraps of string, a small face, overgrown with a rough harvest of stubble, but stamped with intellect by keen grey eyes; one foot dragging a heavy boot, wherefrom a bruised toe peeped pitifully into the night, the other light and fantastic in a once canvas shoe. The hat, jammed upon elfin ringlets, had in the past been of silk, but the period was indefinite. The ancient coat had slipped two paces, so to speak, from the neck; above the collar-bone the skin was fairly clean, even fresh, when it avoided the cross-hatch of wrinkles; beneath this line of demarcation 'twas desolation and dirt. Jack saw the Bystander's glance, and his pride was roused. He put up a well-shaped hand, and shook the refractory garment, even as a terrier worries a rat. The grey eyes were upon the Bystander; their owner leaned forward, and quoted a few apt lines from the chorus of the *Alcestis*.

"Will yer wait for the tea, sir?" said the voice within. "The water's gettin' on the bile."

The Bystander said that he would wait. Jack edged towards him, and they were alone at the corner of the stall, while the unnamed construed the uncertainty upon his new friend's face, and the sonorous Greek into English prose.

"I had forgotten," said the Bystander. "I

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have neglected the classics since I left Cambridge." He lowered his voice, although there was no need.

"I am from t'other place, as they say in the House, from the banks of Isis——"

"'Old on there, Jack! Where be ye a shovin' to, mate? Yer've bin an' spilt me kawfee."

Jack turned with apologies. "'Orl right, ole pal; 'ave a pull outer mine."

The pal was not overloaded with pride, and pulled heartily from the proffered mug, until Jack's countenance grew sad. As he turned again, a ragged flap flew forth like a bird of prey, and swept his slice of cake into the gutter. Jack dived, reclaimed the treasure, whisked off the Edgware Road dust, and placed a goodly portion, for security, in his mouth.

"Excuse me," said the Bystander hurriedly. "You were once a gentleman?"

Jack drew himself up with exceeding dignity, and disposed of the cake with a gulp. "I am a gentleman. It is true I have no address and no income. On the other hand, I enjoy perfect liberty, and am not in debt. Can every gentleman say as much? You are looking at my clothes; call them an eccentricity of genius, and look no more."

"'Ere's the tea, sir. 'Ave anythink to eat?"

"Try the seed," exclaimed Jack eagerly. "It's orl right, ain't it, Tommy?"

"Everythink yer buys 'ere is orl right," replied Tommy the proprietor, and the Bystander, submitting, tried the seed.

"Another slice for me; give us a big 'un," said the gentleman, his eyes wistful, his mouth hungry.

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The long knife descended, and a heavy wedge dropped upon the counter; Jack seized it, and with his unoccupied hand worried his garments indefinitely. Presently the rags gathered round him again, and he timidly pushed the slice back. "Beg parding, Tommy, I wouldn't 'ave troubled, if I'd known."

The proprietor turned from serving a cab-driver, and returned the wedge, as though it were a game of shuffleboard. "You're welcome, matey. I knows yer, Jack; to-morrer night'll do."

The Bystander took in the situation, and proffered a sixpence to pay for both. Jack gave him no direct word of thanks, but turned gratefully, and went on talking. "You see, I don't speak to them as I do to you; they would think me proud. You were assuming that I need a bath? It is true. I had a piece of elastic round the collar of my coat, to keep the garment above the Pillar of Farewell, but I fear the elastic has failed. You do not understand? Each morning I wash me in the Serpentine, and cleanse my face and hands, but never venture below my collar-bone, because I am rheumatic, and dread the touch of cold water. Once a month, oftener when funds run to it, I have a warm bath which costs me twopence net. May I ask what brings you to a coffee-stall?"

The Bystander explained his habit of roaming abroad, and spoke of his interest in the great panorama of life. He loved to watch the characters that haunt the places of cheap food, to wonder at their light-heartedness, as they struggled in the handicap with the odds so heavy against them,

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often to admire their fortitude, and their actions of unselfishness.

From his companion's conversation the Bystander was given much to think about. Jack belonged to the great army of men, who are scattered about London, penniless, destitute, the majority through their own fault, some through the fault of others. Spoiled by their manner of bringing up, they cannot dig; to beg they are ashamed. They idle about street-corners, waiting, until they are shifted on, to idle about other street-corners; sometimes they are moved on to the Embankment, where, in a dark moment, the habit being perhaps strong upon them, they move themselves on—one step, and the street-corners know them no more. There is provender to be gathered in the street, the Bystander learned, sorry sustenance, yet a tight handful of orange-peel and a cigar-stub have often kept life stirring for a few hours.

"After all, at the worst, it is only a question of a few years," commented the philosopher. "All paths lead to the same exit; it is merely a question of an easy or an unpleasant journey."

Jack was an optimist, who was cheerful in every circumstance. He had prepared certain rules for his guidance, and such as the following he observed, strange to say, to the strict letter:—

Never hope, never despair. Take life as it comes, assured that everything occurring is the most fortunate circumstance that could happen.

Be prepared for accidents. To check overpopulation, Providence finds it necessary to remove a certain percentage of the surplus. If you are run

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over, and maimed for life, do not complain. It has been found that there is no room for you on the streets.

For the destitute the Epicurean motto is best; enjoy each hour as much as you can, but never think of the next.

When it is too hot, remember that you once found it too cold. When the ground is frozen, don't complain; it must thaw out.

Work when you feel well, and do your best, but do not work too hard.

Never think of the past; never make plans for the future; always live for the present.

Make friends with every one, but trust nobody.

There were more of such rules for self-guidance, but it would be tedious to enumerate the entire code. Jack personally was a literary man, with the artistic temperament well developed. Art, art, what a motley crew of starved and tattered beings are thy disciples! He possessed a reader's ticket for the British Museum, and whenever he could make himself sufficiently respectable, he would bury himself among the tomes of long-gone thinkers; the results he set down upon paper, supplied as a gift by Government, with an equally gratuitous pen. The day's work would be dropped humbly, for lack of stamps, into the gaping maw of some periodical's letter-box; stamps for the return of the manuscript there were, and could be, none. Wistfully, twice a week, the ragged figure crept within the shades of a secluded public-house, where a kindly landlord allowed his letters to be taken in, always with a smile, and the same anxious question, "Anythin'

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for ole Jack?" Sometimes there was, and the thin face became animated. There were occasional acceptances, and even slips of paper, warrants of reprieve, as from God, authorising our well-beloved Jack to go drag himself a little longer through as much of our sunshine as he might find, and these the landlord changed into glorious gold sovereigns which he counted generously into the shaking palm. Such days were Periods in a Life.

The Bystander prepared to move away. Half a crown lay awkwardly in his hand, and he longed to transfer the large coin but lacked courage. It is not easy to offer a gratuity to a gentleman, even though he be homeless and in rags. "May I walk a little of the way with you?" said Jack, when his mug was drained. "I want a move, after standing so long. You will hardly meet any one you know at this hour. Good-night, Tommy, and thank ye kindly."

They moved away, and the voices of the night followed, hoarse and croaking. "Good-night, Jack, good-night, ole boy; take care o' yerself."

"You see," said the gentleman with his sprightly air, "I am now a London Jack. Once I had a surname, but I have grown away from that. We do not require handles in my society; identity is nothing. When you look at a drifting cloud, you do not consider that it is composed of many million vesicles. You see the one object, and you give it a comprehensive name. Are you a literary man?"

The Bystander admitted that he sometimes dared to desecrate paper, and Jack went on: "I thought

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so. Now, were you to introduce me as a character into one of your dramas of real life, you would offend against all the canons of art and nature. You would take me, dress me, and discover me, when shaved and in my right mind, as a passably handsome fellow. You would find me romantic also, with a trick of music and a song somewhere in my throat, and in the end you would marry me to some fair lady of means, and make me a gentleman again. Why?"

He spoke sharply, almost with anger. The Bystander answered, somewhat feebly: "Nature teaches us that the grub becomes a butterfly."

"Nature does not renew the butterfly. Nature does not recolour the flower that has faded. She cares not how many perish, so long as she has the life that she wants locked up in the egg and the seed. No—the public are false; you—pardon me—are false and I am genuine. You cannot help yourself, because you are a servant of the public. If you speak the true story of life, your books will lie boycotted. Why? Every one has so many troubles, that they shrink from the misery of others, be they real or be they false. Every one desires to make their troubles less, even to make them appear as things of delight; they will not face them, they cannot; they will not think of them, they dare not. They are false, and their lives are false, therefore they desire to read the false lives of imagined beings. Ah, you turn up here—along Civility Street, and so into Respectability Square. I must trespass no farther."

The half-crown rolled from the Bystander's hand, and bounded joyously to the gutter. Jack recovered

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it. "You had better get yourself a bed," said the Bystander.

Jack thanked the donor quietly. "A bed—no! I abhor effeminacy, to pay money for the privilege of sleeping is to put a tax upon nature. On such a night as this a park seat should satisfy a Sybarite. I must not stop, or the gates will be closed, and all my favourite seats will be engaged."

The next meeting occurred in daylight. A sharp wind was blowing through the driving rain. The Bystander hurried along with his head down, until he collided with a gaunt figure, whose tattered garments were soaked, and whose face was shrunk more than usual with cold.

"A nice rain," said Jack, when he recognised the bearer of the umbrella. "I don't understand the present necessity for the wind, but the rain is pleasant."

He shivered, while the sad water poured through a hole in his hat, dashed upon his nose, and thence to the ground. He resembled a drenched gargoyle, perched at the summit of some cathedral tower.

"We have had too much dry weather. Rain is badly needed for the streets, the fields, and the race-courses. I expect this cold wind is to keep back the crops; I hear they are too forward this year. We enjoy a hot day so much more after such weather as this."

The Bystander possessed neither Jack's philosophy nor his happy adaptability. He had already hurled many angry epithets at the weather, and here was Jack, homeless, penniless Jack, walking about in airy rags and shameless boots, and positively

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eulogising the wind and the rain. The Bystander tried to feel ashamed of himself, and passed away, with the shivering voice behind still quavering, "Yes, a beautiful warm rain."

On an expedition to the national treasure-house in Great Russell Street, the Bystander was fortunate enough to meet Jack, not indeed in the Museum, but proceeding thereto, with eyes bright and bird-like, from the tavern opposite. Part of the mystery of the Fall became apparent. Jack was gorgeous, not indeed in purple and fine linen, but in some linen, and boots that were partners. He was jubilant. He had come into a fortune, to use his own expression. A review had accepted an article (written upon government-given paper with the equally gratuitous pen), had published the same, and paid for it, to the extent of twelve paradisical sovereigns. In cold figures Jack demonstrated his ability to live "in needless luxury" upon twenty pounds per annum; so here was he provided for, at one happy stroke, for the greater part of the twelve months. The Bystander bethought him of the tavern, and sighed for human frailty.

"Here is the half-crown, that you were kind enough to lend me in the days of my poverty," said Jack. "Affluence," he continued, "is surely the root of happiness, as we understand it. Money in the pocket makes the sun to shine, and gives the heart confidence. At the present time I feel that I have claims upon a surname."

"And a coat of arms," added the Bystander, with a touch of cynicism, but Jack was forgiving, with the forgiveness that cheap brandy brings.

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Therefore he echoed the words. "Why not? Twelve sovereigns or, upon a field azure; in the second, a litterateur, attired vert, once sable, his face sanguine—"

"And nose gules," added the Bystander sharply. "Where are you going now?"

Jack removed his hat, and rubbed tenderly against the decayed nap. "I'm going back to the Reading-Room, my office, I call it. If I can sell one more article, I shall retire for the year. I would buy several pounds of tobacco, walk into the country, and lie in the fields and woods till autumn."

Some months passed. The Bystander had left London to its dust and sparrows, although he did not spend his leisure consuming nicotine in grass fields. One night in late October he saw the familiar bundle of rags beside the stall in the Edgware Road, and he came upon Jack, drinking his pennyworth of coffee, and reading by the greasy light of the lantern from a small edition of the Odyssey. "An addition to my library; picked it up for twopence this afternoon," he explained. "Lovely night, ain't it?"

The Bystander had not thought so. The wind was biting, and charged with the strange unpleasant odour of the autumn, while now and again came a few great drops of rain.

But Jack was satisfied. "A fresh wind cleanses the place, blows away the germs of disease, purifies the atmosphere by sweeping off the accumulations of carbonic-acid gas." He slapped his hands together, and stamped his feet. "Cold weather is seasonable now. If I choose to go about insuffi-

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ciently attired, I must expect to feel chilly. The wind is not tempered to the worn-out ram."

The Bystander, not feeling disposed to stand in the cold, asked, "How are you doing?"

Jack swallowed the dregs of his mug sadly. "I have lost all my money," he replied, with the air of a man who has been defrauded of thousands. "The unaccountable slowness of certain race-horses made my sovereigns gallop. I could not indulge in my contemplated retirement, after all."

This was the last glimpse that the Bystander was afforded of Jack as an individual; but the class, of which he is a type, remains, and will be always with us. Jack had introduced him to certain friends, who foregathered in the shades between Great Russell and New Oxford Streets, grave elderly men, unkempt, but courteous. How politely they raised their hats, gingerly lest the brim should come away! How eloquently they talked upon every subject, from Sanskrit roots to the latest methods of applying electricity! How interesting they were, sometimes how brilliant, and always how thirsty! There were those who had been beneficed clergymen, schoolmasters, lawyers, doctors, and engineers, and not unknown many of them in their day, when they had possessed a name and an individuality. Among themselves they passed by their Christian names; no reference was allowed to the remote past; it seemed an offence to refer to a comrade as a gentleman, or to remind him that he had ever been a creature of a higher sphere. The Bystander, not aware of this, blundered, but his lesson was taught him by a reverend old fellow, who might have been a

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general masquerading in rags. "I am not a gentleman, sir. I am a most damnable deadbeat!" Can these men ever dare to sleep? Are they never visited by dreams? Can they even think, without calling up a host of sad pale ghosts—home, wife, child? Perhaps they have drunk of bitterness, until their souls know not of memory. Let us hope so; for the peace of the Great Unnamed, let us hope so.

"Old Jack?" said one of the lost, when the Bystander made an inquiry one winter's day. "Yes, I have missed him of late. Come down here, and we'll ask James."

They passed together down the side street, through a door, and into a room that might have been called the Place of Derelicts. The Bystander coughed, because of the fumes of strong tobacco and the sickly odour of stale spirits.

"James, where's old Jack?"

James looked up; he was arguing with another wreck, and liked not interruption. "Old Jack? He's gone."

James went on with his argument, but when the Bystander asked for enlightment, he condescended to become more communicative. "Just before Christmas he was taken with pneumonia, and went into the Middlesex. I went to see him, and he explained to me that dying was the very best thing that could happen to him. I dare say he was right. What? Well, thank you. Three-penn'orth of Scotch, please, miss."

The following month the Bystander picked up a magazine, and found therein an article, signed *John*

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Sawyer; this was the departed Jack's pseudonym. Had that article been published and paid for on the previous month, it would have been another reprieve, the author's life might have been prolonged. How he must have craved for that cheque! How disappointed as month after month slipped away, and the article did not appear! The kindly publican would have received in due course the letter that contained the cheque. He must be waiting, still waiting, for the wistful face at the swing-doors, and the anxious question, "Anythin' for ole Jack?"

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VI

STUDY OF A FAILURE ABROAD

He was shuffling along in front of the little wooden houses, apparently not displeased with himself, his hands in the ragged pockets of a pair of breeches embroidered with holes, and two dirty heels protruding from hopeless shreds of cowhide. He must have found it a puzzle to put on his clothes, to hang them about him bit by bit as it were, so utterly tattered were they : possibly they had been assumed during brighter days and never subsequently removed. A venerable felt hat found a precarious resting-place upon his matted hair. About half a dozen yards ahead of me he shuffled, now and then pausing to secure one of the refractory boots when it seemed likely to desert him ; and he was actually whistling. I didn't recognise the tune, but it sounded lively enough. As the tramp of those regions was not usually a sprightly individual, I became anxious to see this fellow's face, so I walked a little faster to gratify my curiosity.

As I reached the nondescript I turned to get a good look at his profile, while at the same instant a cloud of smoke issued from my lips. I had just finished my evening meal, and was out to stretch my limbs a bit and enjoy my tobacco in what was

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left of the sunshine. I saw a face which could never have been handsome; yet it was intelligent, though the eyes were heavy and the dirt was thick; a scrubby beard spoilt the appearance of what might once have been an elegant moustache; the eyebrows, I noticed, were unusually thick, and the nose was prominent. I had almost stopped, and might have gazed longer, for the fellow interested me; when I was startled to hear myself addressed after the following manner:

"I presume you are fortifying your memory against any possible danger of failing to recognise me on the occasion of our next meeting. I am also at liberty to infer, by your breach of manners in deliberately puffing smoke into my face, that your delight in beholding me, not darkly, but at close quarters, has rendered you temporarily oblivious of those unwritten laws of courtesy which prevail among members of the same social stratum."

This was said in a refined voice. Before I could stir or make any reply, another tongue apparently, with an insufferable drawl and horrible accent, remarked with hearty familiarity: "Well, boss, and how goes it? Pretty good with you, eh?"

I felt as though a whip had cut me across the back of my neck. "Who the deuce are you?" was all I could answer.

"John Holder, gentleman or blackguard, whichever way you like to take him. I have not a card unfortunately; although if I possessed such an article, these garments supply no pocket for its reception. The voice in which I first addressed you was the outcome of Eton and Christ Church,

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and I may mention the only one; that in which I subsequently greeted you, somewhat to your perplexity, was one of the numerous results of my sojourn in this land, the voice, in fact, of the Tough, to use the inelegant expression of the native."

"You will allow me to remark that I prefer the former," I said, trying to imitate his classical style of speech.

"There you have my sympathy, and my right hand if you desire it. The former life was preferable in many ways. Descending to a baser consideration; that tobacco smoke, which you persist in blowing discourteously into my face, is tormentingly fragrant. It has awakened a hunger of Tantalus in my palate, which might be appeased by the trifling gift of a pipeful of the same excellent brand."

He drew a short clay pipe from some strange region, while I gravely handed him my pouch. He welcomed it with a thin and very dirty hand and continued: "Scrape your pipe before borrowing a comrade's pouch. It is an excellent precept, and will at once suggest to a man of your intelligence the advisability of getting all you can out of a man before dropping him. As I have introduced the subject, permit me to strike a personal note and to add that I have been dropped in hard places by men who have got little out of me. Here is your pouch; it is lighter, but not materially so."

He adjusted one of those anomalous boots, then turned to me again. "When you have provided me with the Promethean element, my felicity will reach perihelion; it will indeed touch a point it has

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not attained for a fortnight, dating back from yesterday's impransial dinner-hour. A gentleman, somewhat vulgar, I fear, and by no means my social equal, laid his cigar-case down in the smoking-room of a certain hotel, which I was patronising with a view to turning out the cuspidors, and, being called away suddenly, forgot it. After thanking God, I extracted the cigars, which were few in number, but excellent in quality. Subsequently I made a hurried though dignified exit."

"Hardly the correct thing to do, was it?"

"At the present moment it would be unthinkable. During that hour it amounted to a natural action bordering closely upon socialistic virtue."

Seeing my eyebrows rise he continued: "The explanation is simple. I have already pointed out to you that creation has invested me with two characters, each one engaged upon different lines in assuring the damnation of a single miserable wretch. I have two sets of morals, two voices, two vocabularies, two individualities. Unhappily I do not own two shirts, nor yet a change of motley, but at this time of the year these are of secondary importance. At the moment of annexing the cigars I was a Tough; therefore I was but living up to my character. Now that I am addressing you, it pleases the Almighty that I should be an English Gentleman. Had it been otherwise I should have failed to return you that pouch. The distinction is obvious."

I realised by this time that I had encountered an original being as well as a countryman.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

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Regarding me loftily, he answered with an air of quiet dignity: "I am at a loss to understand whether satire is intended; if so, your mode of applying the question lacks scholarship. Any ordinary individual could see with half an eye that I am going in the direction of that interesting, if somewhat allegorical personage, the Devil, that I am in fact hurrying towards him with open arms, and—in the inelegant phrase of the country—with both legs."

"I did not intend that. I simply wished to know where you are walking to—which part of the city," I added, seeing the need of literal accuracy with this absolute individual.

"Anywhere and nowhere admirably answers your question. I am setting forth from nowhere with the prospect of ending at anywhere; in other words I am looking for a corner where I may pass the night."

"How have you spent the day?"

"Upon stones, smashing them; for which labour the City awarded me fifty cents; a despicable amount."

"Then I suppose you have eaten?" I suggested, feeling myself on dangerous ground.

"I have fared sumptuously," he answered, in a critical tone. "Had you been at the back of the market rather less than an hour ago, you might have observed a poor mongrel dog sneaking along with a large portion of somewhat overcooked and overkept meat between his jaws. Had you waited a little longer, and still kept the animal under observation, you would have seen a man, none too

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well dressed, approach and wrestle with that dog for the meat aforesaid, which was as much his as the animal's, because the dog had probably stolen it; and the man was in any case entitled to take the benefit of the doubt. The dog bit the man, which was quite right and proper, but the superior creature secured the meat. The marks upon this hand will convince you that my story is not unsupported by evidence."

He extended his left hand, which was still bleeding, and resumed: "I am sincerely sorry for the dog, but it was merely a case of the survival of the fittest. We do not go to the wall willingly; we resent the process, while a bite or a struggle remains in us, whether we are well-bred men, or whether we are mongrel dogs."

"You have come down pretty low," I muttered.

"You are correct," he said with a condescending smile. "The downward descent has a damnable rapidity about it; the experience, however, is not without interest; the stings of pain and hunger are after all little felt in the glory of artistic egoism."

"You had your fifty cents," I ventured.

"The entire amount was immediately squandered in a useless and unsatisfactory fashion. There was a woman, possibly without morals, crying upon the street in a shameless manner, giving publicity to the statement that she was heartbroken and starving. She appealed to me, why I cannot guess, for in my present costume I cannot resemble either a dignitary of the church or a philanthropic millionaire. It became therefore necessary to give her my money, for although I might be starving I

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could not persuade myself I was also heartbroken. The balance of ills rested with her. It was annoying, as I loathed the sight of the ——, and had not the least wish to assist her, but it was necessary from a social point of view. It was my evil fate that she should have fallen upon me, and not on some one better qualified to sustain the expense."

He made this statement in tones of absolute indifference, and I began to wonder whether I had stumbled upon a man of genuine intelligence or one wanting in mental capacity. Either way I had quite made up my mind how to act. I could not afford to be a philanthropist, but it was unpleasant to see any man down on his luck, and when the character in question was a countryman, the desire to render some assistance became intensified. So I followed up my thoughts with an invitation: "Come along to my rooms and have a rest."

"You will entertain me, I have no doubt, regally, until an advanced hour of the night. I shall then have to wander forth, probably drunk, possibly very drunk, to seek a resting-place, less than ever inclined to be satisfied with my ill-fortune."

He certainly possessed the most remarkable aptitude for discovering extraordinary answers to every question.

"I will give you a shakedown and a decent suit of clothes."

He fingered the tattered coat almost reverently. "Doubtless the aspersion is deserved," he said thoughtfully. "Yet these garments are allegorical. They cling to me like old associations, and as the latter are forgotten, so do the former drop into

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decay. Their early history has a musty flavour of antiquity. These clothes were perhaps the pride of the tailor's heart, the joy of the customer, whoever he was, for I cannot suppose him to be still alive. They were cut in the accuracy of fashion and fitted with care. Now they are a sorrow to civilisation and a grief to the eyes of the passer-by. It has been the same with me. Once I might have been compared to these garments when first made; now they hang partially over all that is left of me, fit emblems of my present state."

Here was a different side to this complex character. Just then he might have been a Hamlet soliloquising as he fingered the jester's skull. I was about to repeat my invitation, when we reached a street-corner, and immediately a most unmelodious voice broke upon my ear:

"Hello, ole boy? How goes it?"

A tramp came slouching towards us. It was my companion who had spoken, but the alteration in voice and manner was so complete that I quite thought it was the new-comer who had uttered the greeting.

"Rotten! Nothing to pick up round this place. How's yourself, Jack?"

"Tough as hell," said my friend. "Guess I'll have to deadbeat it south."

"That's no go; they're down on us chaps there."

"Down, are they? Well, darn their hides! I'd like to set a few of them on the road and see what they'd make of it. Can't stay, ole boy; here's the boss waiting for me. Solong."

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"Solong, Jack."

The professional tramp shuffled off while the amateur turned to me, with changed voice and manner.

"Upon consideration I have decided to accept your proposal, although a bed and a furnished room are demoralising luxuries. I hope we have not far to go."

Evidently he imagined he was the person conferring the favour. I scarcely knew whether to be amazed at his indifference or annoyed at his offhand treatment of me. "Only about a hundred yards," I said. "I have my rooms in the King block."

"Not at all a desirable part of the city to reside in, I should say, nor sufficiently central for general convenience. However, I must not grumble. I could introduce you to worse places. May I trouble you for your tobacco-pouch?"

Arriving at my rooms, I conducted Holder to my bedroom, gave him an outfit, and left him. I should have required a fresh introduction to the individual who stepped into the sitting-room later, had I again chanced suddenly upon him. Having taken the liberty to use my razor, he had mown off his scrubby beard, had curled his moustache, and washed his face very thoroughly. Indeed he looked, as he himself expressed it, more like the English Gentleman than the Tough. He stretched himself indolently in my particular easy chair, which I had incautiously vacated, and gazed round the room, remarking superciliously at length: "Nice diggings for a man of your position, though nothing to what

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mine were at the House. You live here without a wife to bother you, I hope ? "

I replied that I was single, and had no intention of being otherwise, then asked what he thought of matrimony.

" The greatest failure on God's earth," he replied, with the air of a man whose opinion is worth seeking. " Either the man has to keep the woman, which is annoying, or the woman has to keep the man, which is degrading. If they are both of means, the one possessing the longest bank account takes the fence, sits on it, and crows day and night."

He made a few more philosophical remarks bearing upon the same subject, when I broke in with the question, " How long have you been out from England ? "

He glanced at me almost contemptuously, then, reaching out a hand towards my cigars, said: " The subject is one of such exceeding paucity of interest that I should not have ventured to broach it without your invitation."

Having selected and clipped a cigar with cool deliberation, he continued: " I was educated at Eton, where I was considered, and I believe rightly, the cleverest boy of my time. Never could I have been called popular, as I took no part in athletics, although by certain masters I was pointed out as a model of what a boy should be. During my career at school I was never punished for any breach of discipline. Subsequently I went up to Oxford, with the determination of adding to the lustre of laurels already gained. Continuing upon the same lines, I read doggedly, took no share in sports, made

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few friendships and ended by securing a first in classical honours. Not long after taking my degree I fell to pieces."

"How did you manage that?"

"I settled in London with money in my pocket and more within reach. It was time, I thought, to take a holiday, to enjoy life, not to go on working. There I ruined myself a dozen times over. I had never known what life was, with my nose stuck between the pages of a classical author and my fingers writing endless notes. I plunged into the vortex, whirled round with the rest, drank deeply of every pleasure, and the dose was too strong for me. It killed me in every way; morally and intellectually I became a corpse. I shipped over here with what was left of my cash, and since then have been slipping smoothly down the slope of good intentions into hell."

"Has nobody offered to do you a good turn?"

He glanced at me sideways with a vindictive gleam in his eyes.

"I imagine you call yourself a man of the world; how is it you haven't learnt the first lesson the world impresses upon you? When you behold a fellow-creature tumbling down hill, you do not put out your hand to hold him back, but you advance your foot and expedite his progress, so that he may be the sooner lost sight of and forgotten."

This was all I could get out of him upon that occasion. A few days later, when I had got to know him better and stood somewhat less in awe of his cynical tongue, I ventured to ask whether he had

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ever tried to obtain employment; and he was pleased to answer:

"I will give you a couple of instances, although one is merely a repetition of the other. Soon after I came out the idea first occurred to me that it might be advisable to make my own living, and, happening to hear a reporter was wanted on one of the papers, I applied, along with a rough individual, one I would not have shaken hands with, who looked as though he could not have signed his own name. The editor questioned me about my qualifications, and I informed him that I was an Oxford man, who had taken first-class classical honours. 'That's all very well,' he said, 'but what experience have you in up-to-date journalism?' I replied that I had none, but it would be easy for me to pick up all the knowledge that could be required in a day or two. I added that my prose style was irreproachable. 'Full of language nobody can understand,' the idiot answered. 'We don't require good English. We want sharp reports, and grammar may go to the deuce. We want a man with lots of cheek, who can worry an interview out of a crowned head if necessary, and be all over the place gleaning up the news and smelling out scandal.' Then he turned to the disreputable being at my side and said, 'Well, sir, are you after the post?' 'Lightning shorthand, type-written reports, five years head interviewer to Daily Journal, only four men escaped me. Here are my papers.' He rattled this out in a single gasp and chucked a bundle of papers upon the editor's desk. 'I guess you'll do,' said he, as I moved off."

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I smiled, though I could not blame the editor.

"Later, when I had dropped a few rungs lower, I applied for a situation in a wholesale house. The manager, a red-faced, yellow-whiskered buffoon, as usual led off with the miserable question as to qualifications. 'Oxford,' he exclaimed, pulling at his whiskers. 'Let's see now, where did I hear tell of the place? Somewhere up in the mountains, ain't it?' Longing to choke him all the time, I replied that Oxford was a town in England. He brightened up and said, 'Ah, yes, I know. That's where they run a sort of old-fashioned school.' I walked off without another word."

"Surely you have friends in England?" I suggested after another interval.

"Yes," he replied, falling back into his old mood. "I have numerous relations, but I have thrown them over."

He paused and a startled expression of genuine trouble appeared upon his face; half rising from his chair he sank back again and fell to fingering his pipe irresolutely. At length he looked up, with an extraordinarily vacant smile, and rose with heavy movements. Across the floor he shuffled, stopping at the door a moment to remark in a nasal voice, "Guess I'm going out to have a fling with the boys."

Slouching into the bedroom, he put on the filthy garments he would not allow me to throw away, and shuffled out of the house, all rags and bad language. About midnight he rolled back, drunk and helpless. I bundled him upon the bed, and next morning he rose, without a word of excuse, quite oblivious of his late conduct, my most patron-

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ising master and guardian, and filled with inspired ideas concerning his own future.

"To-day," he said, as we sat at breakfast, "I will adopt the strenuous life and will begin to earn my own living, and at the same time hand to the world matter to ponder over. Too long, sir, have I permitted the fires of genius to smoulder ineffectually in that portion of my being beyond the reach and understanding of physiologists, where such elements do smoulder. I propose to write a history of the Siege of Troy, from the rape of Helen up to and including the madness and death of Ajax. The style shall be as light and pleasing as my present manner of addressing you, for I do not forget that entertainment is the chief, and in most cases the only, end of history."

Here was an entirely new side, and the pleasantest I ever saw. The greater part of that day, which was hopelessly wet, he entertained me with much learning and not a little humour, although I was unable to discover how such work would profit him. He was a skilful draughtsman, and, much to my amusement, reproduced the city of Troy with ridiculous details, the Greek lines, the ships under different commanders; and in a distant corner a small tent by itself with a black flag flying at the apex.

"The tent of Achilles," he explained, in answer to my question. "He is sulking after the manner of distinguished generals, and has raised the black flag, as a public signal of the fact that he is under persecution at the hands of the commander-in-chief who was the king of men, and was killed at last

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by a woman. You will remember there was a girl even in the case of Achilles and his king, and I am sorry to add a servant-girl. It is objectionable how these young women creep in everywhere. Sulking must have been intolerable in those days, when there were no good cigars, or bad novels, to while away the hours."

He launched off into a long discussion, in which he pointed out that, however good the wooden horse might have proved in practice, theoretically it was utterly unsound; that, had Sinon not been possessed of an infinitely higher intelligence than Ulysses, the scheme must have failed miserably. "As usual the laurel wreath falls on the wrong head." He demonstrated also, that the snakes, which destroyed Laocöon and his sons, were entirely imaginary. "It is merely a poetical way of stating that the priest, together with the sons who followed in their father's footsteps, fell victims to the national beverage, and died of *delirium tremens*."

So he went on until evening, wasting the day in idle talk, much of it beyond me, casting in classical quotations everywhere, so that it became impossible for me to follow his meaning to the end of a sentence. All the time he treated me as though he were a learned professor, and I the student. While he talked I was supposed to bite my tongue and absorb wisdom. All that he permitted me to do was to express my entire agreement with his views, and I never ventured to differ from them.

I mention this, foolish though it appears, for the sake of presenting a whole picture of this strange man's intellect, or rather to reveal one distinct

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trait of his extremely complex nature. He seemed to be cursed with two definite characters, each of which possessed any number of phases, changing with the frequency and speed of the kaleidoscope. I fed, lodged, and clothed him for a period extending a little over five weeks, but during the whole of that time not a single word of gratitude, or even of appreciation, passed his lips. He regarded me as a social and intellectual inferior; probably he was right, but in the light of our respective positions he might have spared me the indignity of treating me as such. He was doing nothing for me, while I was doing much for him. Yet I liked him in a way; I had hitherto found the long evenings tedious, and his startling conversation aroused me to reflect on subjects which had never before touched my imagination. It interested me also to note the unending conflict taking place within him, the struggle between the gentleman of refinement and the unprincipled loafer. This presented a psychological problem, which I have never been able to work out to my satisfaction.

On a later occasion I followed him, saw him consort with a throng of blackguards, the least repulsive of whom looked as though he would not stick at a murder if he could gain profit thereby; and this gang collected in a low saloon in the worst part of the city, drinking bad liquor and quarrelling loudly for sheer love of anarchism, while I wondered where the money came from to pay for their treat. All I know is, that the foulest tongue and most pugnacious spirit in that depraved assembly belonged to my associate, John Holder. Listening at

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the open door of the saloon, I gathered from his lips a few opinions as to how society ought to be utterly destroyed.

During the period of his stay with me I never once heard him laugh, nor indeed ever saw him smile in a really satisfactory manner. When a gentleman he was cynical and opinionative; when a blackguard he was disgusting and offensive. He was not like most men, ready to harp upon some bright incident of the past. Once only did he ever refer to that past or display any leaning towards sentiment. It was a Sunday evening, and we were sitting together beneath the lamplight. He had been silent for several minutes, which was unusual. Suddenly I asked him with profound respect what he was thinking about, and then he raised his head and replied, indirectly as usual, to my question:

"An entire change may work its revolution in an incredibly short space of time. Some men, by no special effort of their own, ascend hand over hand up the ladder of fame; in a year or so they find themselves, through no fault apparently, dropping as swiftly in an opposite direction. A man rises from his bed in the morning, to find his name on every one's tongue; shortly after he may slink to his bed at night, wondering how he can find the courage to face the morrow. It is a fool's dance, and every pleasure, every success even, wears the ugly mask of death."

I feared he was only going to philosophise and I did not feel in the mood to listen to his metaphysical ramblings. However, he started off on a fresh tack.

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"About a month before you introduced yourself to me, and gave me the opportunity to frequent your chambers, I was hovering in my usual voracious condition outside one of the principal hotels, waiting for the indefinite meal to turn up. Presently a buggy came along, containing a lady and gentleman. The latter sprang to the ground with the intention of entering the building. Being English, he did not grasp the use of the hitching-weight, and as the horse was restive he did not like leaving his partner. At length the lady drew his attention towards the loafer, and he called me to hold the horse while he went into the hotel. Glad of the prospect of a fee, I obeyed, though when I glanced at the lady's face, I thanked Providence for having done at least one thing for me—endowed me with nerves of steel. There sat a girl whom I had met constantly in society, whom I had taken in to dinners, sat out with at dances, whom I had accompanied to various places of frivolity, until her name and mine became linked together. There I saw the girl, whom in the old country I had ridden with, whom I had rowed upon the river, whom I had walked with in fair gardens of an evening. And now there she was, and there was I. It had only been a few years before, yet we had not a word to say to each other. Those years had not changed her; she looked as beautiful as ever, and I—was I not still a man, a human being, even though my face was seamed with dirt and my clothes would scarcely hang together?"

I think he forgot the presence of a comparative stranger, as he rambled on in lower tones:

"I believe I loved her—mad and foolish thing

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that love. I think she liked me. I sent her a bouquet of roses late in the year with the last coin of ready money I possessed. Secrets leaked out; rivulets trickled together from all sides, uniting into a torrent which carried me off my feet. I was drowned and I died."

I coughed a little uneasily, and Holder started at discovering me. "Oh, I was telling you a yarn, wasn't I? Well now, where had I got to? Yes, I recognised this girl whom I had known in England, and when her husband came out I knew him well enough too. He was a good fellow, and many a time have I assisted him into a hansom after indulging too freely in my champagne. I got hold of a paper that evening and saw they were mentioned as passing through the city on a tour round the world."

He stopped again in his abrupt way and fell again into the musing fit. "He didn't recognise me as he gave me a tip. Funny, ironical world, that he should give me a tip; but her face was pale and her lips were compressed tightly. As the buggy moved off, she drew her hand from the pocket of her cloak, half turned, and I saw something fluttering to the ground. I picked it up and found a twenty-dollar bill."

"So she recognised you?"

He started as though he had again forgotten my presence. "I suppose so," he said shortly, and then cynically, "she always had a wonderful memory for faces."

"The money set you up for a time?"

"Up in heaven for two days and nights. I never

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knew what drunkenness was till then. It was that or the river, and I preferred to drown myself in whisky. I will ask you to excuse me," he continued with his customary indifference. "I am unusually fatigued to-night."

He departed, while I went on reflecting upon what I had heard. After a time I fancied I heard a curious sound, which at first I supposed to be the wind outside, but presently discovered that it proceeded from the bedroom. I crept into the passage, and, perhaps somewhat meanly, listened. I was not sure then, I could not swear to it now, but I think, I really do believe, that this strangely constituted individual was struggling to stifle his sorrow in the pillow.

Next morning he was as unpleasant as ever. I had just bought a meerschaum pipe, which I intended as a present for a man who had done me a service. Naturally I was a good deal annoyed to find Holder sitting in my easy chair, calmly smoking this new pipe, and supremely indifferent to the fact that he was spoiling the article for the purpose intended.

If it had been worth the trouble, I could easily have filled a Boswell-like volume with his original sayings and a detailed account of his actions, for he was nearly always talking when I was there to listen, and when I was out doing something unnatural. But after five weeks I felt I had seen enough of the man, for his extreme selfishness grew monotonously irritating. Work was very difficult to find in the city, but after some not very agreeable labour, I managed to secure for him a clerkship

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in a small firm and hurried off to tell him the good news. It was not a very excellent berth certainly, but might have led in time to something better. Imagine therefore my feelings at his stately reply:

"It is impossible for a gentleman of my position and attainments to contemplate the acceptance of such an obscure post as that you have been authorised to submit to me. Pray let us drop this subject; it is extremely distasteful to me."

And so the matter had to drop, though I felt strongly inclined to remind him of a profane ruffian I had seen disgracing the streets only the day before.

As I was every day expecting orders from the department to start on a northern trip, I informed Holder that he might accompany me as assistant-clerk. His reply was exactly what I might have expected:

"The cultured intellect shrinks from being brought into contact with the untutored savage; the highly civilised mind also revolts against the manifold discomforts of camp-life and the enforced solitude of the northern regions." His tones implied clearly enough: "The idea of being placed under you, to have to look to you for orders, is insufferable."

What was I to do with him? How was I to get rid of the hulking cuckoo I had foolishly placed in my own nest? Inexplicable as it may appear, I could not summon up courage to give him marching-orders. Somehow I could not go up to this condescending gentleman who hung about my rooms day and night, talking Greek and Latin, looking complacently upon me from his great height of

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social position and learning, and tell him plainly that I could not keep him any longer and he must go. I had opened my door to the wolf, and, if I did not take care, it might end by the wolf becoming master and closing the door against the rightful owner. It was necessary, however, that I should get rid of him before starting north, for I was far from well off, and my parasite, although I dare say he called me his, was a continual source of expense, being as greedy for pocket-money as any schoolboy, and equally unscrupulous in his demands for it. Glad to have a companion, I would have grudged nothing within my means, if he had only given me a single word of thanks, or treated me as a gentleman. I had never mingled in London society; I was not a University man, and my classical knowledge was limited. Therefore I was a nobody, a mere atom amid a like crowd of nonentities. I was allowed to feed, lodge, clothe, and provide him with necessaries, even with luxuries, and he would take all that I could offer; but the indebtedness still lay on my side, not on his.

On my way home one evening I passed the lighted window of a pawnbroker's shop where I had frequently picked up a bargain in the shape of books or china. It struck me, as I hurried by, that I had caught a glimpse of something exposed in the window that was familiar. Turning back I saw three volumes which I felt certain were mine, and upon entering the shop discovered that my surmises were correct. These books had been presented to me years before by a friend since dead, and I would not have parted with them under any con-

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sideration. It was in no pleasant frame of mind, therefore, that I entered my rooms, feeling it intolerable that a man, whom I had practically rescued from starvation, should rob me behind my back, and make away with my property as though it were his own.

Holder was stretched out in my easy chair, which I was very seldom allowed to occupy, engaged upon his history of a mythical period, and glanced at me as though I had no right to intrude upon his privacy. As my blood was up I went straight to the point, accused him of pawning my books, and demanded an explanation. He looked at me with a half-insolent, half-pitying smile, and, as I concluded, yawned ostentatiously.

"I have always prided myself on the excellence of my memory," he said, "but on this occasion it seems to have failed me. For the last few days I have been carrying this in my pocket, intending to present it to you on a first opportunity; but whenever you appeared the matter chanced to slip away from my mind."

He drew from his pocket an envelope addressed to me, handed it across with a stately bend of his head, and began to break open a box of cigars I had brought in with me.

I tore open the envelope and found inside—a pawn-ticket!

He extracted a cigar, clipped it, and continued: "I presume you are familiar with the process. You present the ticket, render the amount advanced, together with a trifling sum of interest, and reclaim the goods. It is perfectly simple."

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"But what right had you—— ?" I stammered.

His eyebrows went up in aggravating fashion. "My dear man," it was the first time he had thus addressed me, "you must surely understand me by now. My identity changed at a moment when I required a small amount of ready cash. There was nothing for it but to pawn something, and it struck me those books would bring in about the amount I required. Of course, in my present state I should never take them without your consent, for the act would be both ungentlemanly and dishonourable."

I gazed blankly at the empty space in the bookcase, with the volumes falling helplessly against each other. "Is there anything else—have you stolen any other article ?" I asked at length.

"Stolen is not a pleasant word, and I resent the use of it. There is nothing else; had there been, you would have received the pawn-tickets collectively. But this subject has absolutely no interest; let us converse on some more congenial topic."

I was so overmastered by his consummate impertinence that I weakly gave way and never reverted to the incident.

Our separation occurred soon after this, although I was not the one to make the final move. Indeed, left to myself, I doubt whether I should ever have found courage to suggest the change; for I was beginning to realise that Holder was as firmly astride of my shoulders as ever the Old Man of the Sea was upon Sindbad's.

A few days after the incident just narrated, I was called away on duty, in connection with an Indian Reserve, a day's journey across the plains. Not

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reckoning on being absent more than three days, I did not think that my companion, who absolutely refused to accompany me, would have time to indulge in any serious unpleasantness. However, as is generally the case, I was kept longer than I had anticipated, and a week passed before I returned to the city and with some misgivings made towards my rooms. I opened the door with my latch-key.

There was no Holder, and there were likewise missing a great many other and far more important articles. The wretch had made a clean sweep: everything, except weighty articles of furniture, had been taken, books, pictures, china, all my most cherished possessions; boxes had been broken open; the whole place was in confusion; and piled on the centre table in neat array were numerous little heaps of pawn-tickets, also half a sheet of note-paper bearing the casual explanation:

"Abstraction has again become necessary, this time upon a larger scale. You should find all the tickets here, unless the caretaker has ventured to interfere with them. I should consider myself guilty of an extraordinary act of dishonesty if I had overlooked a single one. It is unfortunate that the less interesting side of my character should have been so much in evidence during your absence. You are not on the whole a lucky individual."

I had to overdraw my account to regain my property, as I did not care to take the remedy the law afforded and proceed against the pawnbrokers. I was only too pleased to be rid of the incubus, although I half expected him to return and attempt

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to reinstate himself in his old position on my shoulders.

Once again I was fated to set eyes on John Holder. It was early in the autumn of the same year, immediately after my return from the north. I had been dining at a certain hotel and, as I stepped from the lift into the entrance-hall, I caught sight of a stooping figure, apparently searching for something it had dropped. But when I glanced at that face, adorned again with the scrubby beard, I shrank back quickly behind the news-stand, for I did not wish the recognition to be mutual. Thus screened, I observed how he was occupied, and a thrill of pity visited my weaker nature when I saw him engaged in hunting for cigar-ends, gathering these remnants of other men's enjoyment from under chairs and tables, even rescuing them from the cuspidors, shoving them into his pocket, which had once been my pocket, to smoke at leisure by way of supper. Ah, but I was sorry for the man, when I saw the long thin hands shaking with cold, for the night was extremely chilly, feeling about the tiled floor; but I did not dare speak to him or even show myself, for I had learnt his character and I am not to be bitten twice by the same dog. So I slipped out of the hotel, leaving the former scholar of Eton and Christ Church to his pathetic occupation.

Some months went by, and I concluded that I had really seen the last of my companion and might consider the incident closed. But Holder remembered me after I had well-nigh forgotten him.

I was finishing breakfast one morning about mid-

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winter, when a friend broke in upon my solitude for a chat, and presently asked if I had heard the latest city news.

I replied that my paper hadn't come, and asked what it was.

"Nothing more important than a suicide in one of the low-class hotels; as it was performed in the presence of a witness we have the details. The fellow who gives the account is an ordinary whisky-shark, and declares that the deceased confided to him last evening that he had got a little cash, and proposed they should take a room in some den and have a good soak. Of course he agreed, so they went to the Star, engaged a room upstairs, and began to drink. About midnight the deceased rose and said, 'Well, ole boy, the money's all gone. What sort of hell are you going to make for now?' The fellow replied in some way or other, and the other went on, 'I settled it for midnight, and midnight it is. So good-bye, ole boy.' He put out his hand, and naturally the fellow asked what he meant. 'My friend the Devil has arranged to visit me at midnight,' was the answer; and then the speaker walked across to a mirror at the opposite side of the room, looked in it for a moment, cursed himself, pulled out a revolver, and shot himself through the chest."

"Dead, of course."

"No; he was looking in the glass and intended to shoot himself through the heart; but he drew the revolver with his left hand and, being a little muddled by drink I suppose, sent the bullet through his right lung. They have taken him to the hospital

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where he can die in peace. I'll bet you he's some broken-down Englishman."

"I reckon he is," I muttered, for I could not help associating him with my late companion.

That same day a medical student called at my rooms and left a letter addressed to me in a shaky hand. I tore it open and found, scrawled on a scrap of paper, the following scarcely legible words:

"This world was not meant for me. Nature never quite attained to me. I return to the centre of life which I ought never to have quitted. It is a satisfaction to think I am passing my last few hours as the English Gentleman. To you I bequeath the History of the Siege of Troy. It is interesting, and should be valuable, as the sole remaining expression of a remarkable mind. Now, dear sir, it is my sorrow to have to bid you farewell."

There his dignity had forsaken him. Lower down a few more words were scrawled, which after much labour I made out to be:

"The descent has ceased. I am on the edge of darkness. Before me lies the Infinite; behind (the words were utterly illegible). I am sorry I robbed you, for you are the only one who has ever been kind to me out here. You saw little. You knew nothing. There was no heart."

Here the writing ended and I knew the mask had fallen. I could not think of his baseness to me. Even now, when I want to recall him, I think of the man who gave all his little money to the starving woman, and the man who sobbed himself to sleep that night in my bedroom.

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Mechanically I drew on my coat, and walked out in the direction of the hospital. Meeting a doctor who was known to me, I stopped him with a question concerning the wounded man.

"He was in no state to struggle against shock, as he must have been next door to starvation for some time. He was just skin and bones, with hardly a rag to cover them."

"Is he dead?"

"He is dead."

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VII

THE FROZEN MAN

THE country was the home of the cold genius of the north: a ridiculous ball of sun, no warmer than the moon, surrounded by coronae, the air glittering with crystals, every bush and bough coated with glazed frost; I had but to kick up the snow to see a shower of diamonds; and above the steel-blue of the horizon hung a mirage, a deserted city of ice, a place of dreams and folklore. While I was staring at the spires and pinnacles shooting upward from silent streets of cloud, looking in vain for the snow-clad ghosts which should have been walking there, Chief Factor Armstrong came across, drew the corn-cob from his mouth, and spoke:

"It's real good of you to go with Mac. I couldn't send him out by himself, as you might say, for Sinapis as a companion is no better than a dog. The boy isn't right either—swears he is, but I know better. I believe he's sick. He must go, for I've no one else."

"Old Mac is a good sort," I said.

"The best in the world, when you can keep him off religion and whisky. He's fond of preaching, and the other thing. Here come the dogs," Arm-

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strong went on heartily. "Good-luck to you, good weather, and lots of thanks."

The assistant-factor, MacDonald, and myself were about to start upon an expedition to the north. Game of every kind had been scarce that season, not a fox came near the fort, even wolves appeared to have deserted us: so we were going to explore the country for signs of the fur-bearers, as we couldn't place much reliance upon the reports of wandering natives, although these same individuals had lately supplied Armstrong with information which made a journey of investigation necessary. According to them a party of Germans were passing through the country further north, trapping and shooting all the furs they could find, thereby infringing upon the rights of the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay.

"There's no truth in the yarn," Armstrong had said. "Anyway, it's like this: if I make a search for these fellows, it will be found that the story is false. If I don't look for them, it will be true, and I shall hear something about neglect of duty."

The long sleigh lay upon the glistening snow before the fort, packed with provisions and furs, while Sinapis with a heavy whip attempted to control the team of twenty-four dogs, the finest lot in the country, and the pride of the chief factor's heart. Well they might be, for the famous breed of sleigh dog, or husky, as the animal is generally named, is well-nigh extinct to-day. These powerful brutes are more like bears than dogs. Their strength and staying powers are enormous, and their ferocity

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is on a par with their hardiness, which is indeed almost abnormal, as I have driven a team for a week on nothing but a little hard biscuit, with a few scraps of deer pemmican and frozen fish strips once in the twenty-four hours. Yet they have snapped as fiercely and been to all appearance as lusty on the last few miles as at the start.

Sinapis crawled into the back of the sleigh, the long lash curled out, the leaders yelped impatiently and bit each other. The next moment we were gliding along swiftly, enveloped in the smoke-like breath of the dogs, while old Armstrong waved a farewell from the fort. There is nothing half so exhilarating as a good scamper over the northern plains, wrapped up to the nose tip, lying full length along the sleigh, with a score of thoroughbred dogs in front. Away on all sides extended the snow-covered wastes, broken here and there by dark-green fir bluffs, their tresses blue with ice. Not a man, not an animal, nor bird, nor insect could be seen for miles. But what of that? It was glorious to see the pale-blue sky spotted with fragile cirri, to watch the frost dancing around, and to feel the sharp prick of the crystals against the exposed cheeks and nose, and to hear the comfortable swish of the sleigh as it slid along, and the quick panting of the dogs.

That first day we travelled at a great rate, for the snow was solid and fairly even, although at times we would glance with a sudden shock off a hidden point of rock, or grate over a fallen tree trunk which the last sprinkle of snow had managed to cover. At evening we camped well inside a bluff,

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keeping up a huge fire, which was indeed needed, for our little spirit thermometer marked forty-six below zero when I read it at ten o'clock, and it would sink lower than that before morning.

It was not until we had finished supper, and were bending to light our pipes at the fire, that MacDonald put a suspicion I had been harbouring for the last hour into words.

"Say," he remarked; "been watching the boy lately?"

Sinapis appeared restless and miserable. He never spoke, moved listlessly, and accomplished his tasks without any show of alacrity, working slowly and heavily, although that was no new thing with him.

I answered MacDonald's question with another, "What's wrong with him?"

He snorted impatiently. "Sick, and dead sick, too. He was bad when we started, but wouldn't own to it, darn him."

"He'll be all right to-morrow."

"That's a silly thing to say. You know what a flimsy affair an Indian's constitution is. He's sick one day, dead the next. Doing his usual chores in the morning, taking his long rest at night. It's no use kicking back because you don't want to go on. What we want to do is to face the question."

"Let's put him in the sleigh, cover him up, and if he is all right in the morning the better for us. If he isn't, we'll have done all we can. You might have been worse off, Mac. If I hadn't come——"

"If you weren't here I shouldn't think twice about

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it," he interrupted. "I should hitch up the huskies first thing in the morning, and start to work crossing those tracks we made to-day."

Unluckily next morning there could be no question about the seriousness of the man's illness. What the disease was I couldn't tell; but his strength had gone, his head and body were racked with pains, and altogether he seemed in a bad way. However, we started off north as soon as we had partaken of some food, and made good progress all forenoon. Then evil fortune overtook us. We reached bad country, covered with rocks, and protected upon either side by a deep bank of pines. Here the snow-bed was uneven. The sleigh, instead of gliding over the surface, broke through the crust, while the dogs sank up to their bellies, tugging ineffectually, and filling the air with their short angry barks.

MacDonald and I looked at each other. Anger was visible all over his face, as he shouted sulkily to the dogs, who ceased from their labours willingly enough.

"Just what I told you," he grumbled. "Directly Sinapis is struck down, this sort of job crops up. We're going to have a happy day, I tell ye."

There was no help for it. We lashed on the snowshoes and walked ahead of the dogs, breaking a trail for them. It was hard work, and took all the breath we could spare, so there was little talk until we reached a good camping-place and began to fix up for the night. Luckily the last few miles had been fairly easy, so we looked forward to good going on the morrow. It was worthy of note that

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during the whole of the day's journey we had never sighted a living thing.

Sinapis was better, I thought. He was quieter and had stopped groaning. He lay still, and did not appear to notice either of us. We did what we could—little enough—then left him and tried to get to sleep ourselves. The night was milder, if twenty-five below may be called warm, but we were well sheltered by bluffs on every side.

I was beginning to doze when MacDonald hit me in the ribs with the stem of his pipe, and I saw his quaint hairy face near mine.

"Man," he whispered, "have ye seen the boy?"

"Not for the last hour or two. What's wrong?" I said.

"Have ye seen his eyes?"

"Get away, Mac," I muttered.

"I saw his eyes," he went on, "I waved my hand up and down and they never winked. Man, he's crazy."

"Look here, Mac," I said, "keep your horrors to yourself, and let me get to sleep."

"Crazy," he repeated unpityingly. "Knows he's going to die, and the fear o' death has crazed his brain because he's a papist, and knows——"

I put out an arm, pushed him off—I dare say I cursed. MacDonald returned to his own side of the fire, quoted Scripture at me, expressed a wish for a Bible that he might quote some more, and the last thing I heard as he settled down for sleep was a fervent whisper, "Man, I'd give a year of my life for a wee bottle o' Glenlivet."

Our luck improved when we made a start in the

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morning. The bad country was soon left behind, and we scudded over a level bed at high speed, covering a large area of country that day; but we saw no game, only a few snow-birds with a wolf slinking away here and there. It was indeed a barren season. Nor did we discover any tracks of the band of trappers we had come out to look for, so we attributed the story to the imagination of the native brain, although it transpired later that the report was true. The men were never caught; but they quarrelled when nearing the flats of Hudson's Bay, and the result was that two men, both Russians and not Germans, were picked up by the Indians fearfully hacked with knives about face and body.

About four o'clock that afternoon we were gliding along briskly in the mysterious semi-darkness, when I found that my eyes troubled me. They smarted, and the lids twitched continually. Hanging my arm over the side of the sleigh, I caught up some snow to rub on my face. While raising my hand I happened to glance towards stolid old MacDonald, and to my amazement discovered a pink halo round his grizzled head. Turning my throbbing eyes towards the dogs, I noticed a soft pink radiance glowing round their bodies, while the steam-like breath pouring from their mouths floated away in roseate clouds, which to a poetical mind might have suggested an effect of sunrise.

While I was wondering at the meaning of this phenomenon, MacDonald turned his head, and gazed at me solemnly with eyes that blinked and twitched like mine.

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"Hello, Angel!" he exclaimed, without a vestige of humour in his voice.

I stared at him, and he continued, "I don't want to flatter ye, but you'd make a good Catholic idol just now. There's a red ring round your head any saint might envy."

"You've got one too," I said.

"Darn the lights, anyway," he muttered. "'Tis bad enough to see 'em when you're snug at home. When they strike ye out here 'tis death for somebody. He's going."

"Keep off that," I muttered.

"If Sinapis isn't going off, one of us is. I guess it's better him than you or me."

The long lash curled savagely over the brightly coloured backs of the dogs, and we bounded along in silence, while I fixed my eyes upon a thick clump of firs which looked as though they were on fire. Presently a gruff exclamation at my shoulder made me start.

"Here they come—the devil's lights!"

I put my head back and glanced at the sky. Lurid tongues were creeping up from the magnetic north, and advancing with slow movements across the sky. They resembled flames of fire seen indistinctly through a cloud of smoke. On the opposite side flaming spindles shot upward in a clear sky, as though striking at invisible foes with their spear-like tips; and at the same time I heard a low moaning, like wind round a street corner on a wintry night. Otherwise there was silence, awful silence. Gradually the red hue became more pronounced, the air grew ghastly, figures seemed to

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creep by, the snow around might have marked the scene of a great carnage. MacDonald's face looked livid and awesome. I glanced once at the still countenance of Sinapis, but recoiled at the sight.

Few words passed, and presently we reached the pine bluff we had long been heading for. A cloud of fire crested the summit. We began to prepare our camp, between the slender columns stretching in lengthy corridors on each side, faintly illumined, as if to receive us, with the lambent lights.

We examined Sinapis, and one look passed between us. Amateur doctor that I was, a glance was enough to convince me the man was worse. His limbs were hot and covered with red spots. With his feeble arms he endeavoured to toss off the furs; and if he could suffer from an excess of heat in that atmosphere, I knew he must be sick indeed. I looked at the thermometer, feeling that the temperature must be nearing an exceptional point. The spirits were skulking away at the bottom, and the index marked sixty-one. I returned with the intelligence to my companion.

"Ninety-three degrees of frost, Mac."

He raised his shaggy head. "Well, Angel, that's about the limit. A few more degrees and we shall be smothered. I knew it was something low. The air strikes like fire."

"A steady blow of wind now——"

"And we should be shrivelled up like dead leaves."

We made four large fires at a slight distance from each other. For a couple of hours we toiled with axe and saw, felling wood to keep us in fuel for the

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night; but every other minute we had to pause and gasp for breath. Meantime the heavens were growing scarlet; the snow might have been soaked in blood; my companion's face grew more corpse-like. Load after load of resinous wood we carried to the camp, then settled down to nibble at what food we could manage to thaw. After an altogether insufficient meal, we sat down opposite each other to enjoy our only pleasure, a good pipeful of tobacco. The dogs gathered round, snapping at one another, lying so close to the fires that the air soon became filled with the odour of singeing fur, and we had to drive them back, lest they should place us in a quandary by committing suicide. Hard by lay Sinapis, wrapped up in the sleigh, never moving nor speaking.

Nature has especially ordained that when the temperature reaches an extremely low point two things may not happen: a fire cannot burn dully, nor may the wind blow. Were it otherwise human existence in the far north would often be impossible.

We smoked silently for an hour or more, only rising at intervals for fresh supplies of wood. The mysterious atmosphere bathed us in its red waves; the fiery cones and spindles above kept on darting and flashing; the shuddering shadows crept upon the trees. It was a remarkable night indeed.

Presently MacDonald drew the last mouthful of smoke from his pipe. As he drew the little canvas bag out of his pocket—in winter he always carried his tobacco cut—he eyed me in a solemn fashion, and said, "Do ye see, Angel?"

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"I'm not blind," I answered a bit testily, for I looked upon him as a superstitious old fool.

"Do ye hear, Angel?" he continued in the same monotonous voice.

"Quit calling me Angel!" I shouted. "And talk of something else. It's nothing but the aurora."

"That's what they say. What makes the sounds? What makes the red lights jump around in the sky? What makes the shadows we see crawling around? Men whose heads are too big for their bodies talk about electricity and terrestrial magnetism, and clever enough they think themselves I have no doubt. But get 'em together, drive 'em in a bunch, and ask 'em straight what is electricity an' what is terrestrial magnetism? You'll see them sit down and suck their thumbs."

"There are wiser men than us, Mac."

"There's a clever and common-sense way of looking at things," he said stubbornly. "One man wants to find the height of a wall. He takes a sheet of paper and a lot of fiddling tools, draws pictures, and decorates them with half the letters in the alphabet. At last he works out a sort of answer, mostly wrong. Another man slips to the top of the wall, drops a plumb-line down, makes a knot in the line, and measures it. One's the clever way of finding the height of that wall and the other is the natural way. Give me the last."

"What's your idea, then, about the red lights?"

"The devil fixes 'em up to scare us lonely fellows, and to warn us there's trouble coming."

"Why do we only see them out here? Why only in the extreme cold?"

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"Don't you try and corner the devil. He uses different methods to scare folk in other places. The red lights do show further south, and harm always comes with them. Sinapis will die."

"Because the aurora happens to be red once in a way, it's no reason why a man should die."

"Two years ago there was just such another night, the sky on fire and the snow bloody," went on MacDonald, in his unhappiest voice. "Factor Robinson went out on the ice of the bay to look for his little dog, which had strayed from the fort. We picked him up next morning, smashed by a bear, so that his own mother wouldn't ha' known him. I helped to carry him back, took the shoulders, I did, and his head was like a rotten apple some one had set their foot on. Kept touching my legs, too. Man, I had to shut my eyes."

I tried to laugh his words away, but only a dry sound came from my throat. No man could have been light-hearted amid such weird surroundings.

"This night, further south, no electric instruments will obey the hand of any man," my cheerful comrade rambled on. "Telephones, telegraphs, all the rest of 'em, won't work, or will perform on their own account. Aye, on nights of this sort messages come along the wires, and the operators are called up by hands which have no flesh on 'em."

"Free electricity has powers of which we know little," I said.

"There ye are again. You're welcome to your notion and all you can make of it. Here's a little story, and if it isn't true, may my tongue be frost-

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bitten. In a small town, a year or two agone, the red lights came along, and all the telegraph stations were closed. Late at night one of the operators went into the office for something, and while there the signal sounded. He stepped up and prepared to take down the message. The needle ticked away, only one word was transmitted, only one word, Angel. They say he fainted right off."

"What was it?"

"Death. Just that one word. Three months later it came for him."

"You've got queer notions, Mac."

"Maybe, Angel. There are queerer round us. I remember a fellow telling me once how, when the lights were bad, he switched on his telephone and listened. He wasn't a chap of powerful imagination, but he fairly made me shiver when he described how he heard the things twisting and turning round the wire outside, whispering and chattering, and groaning——"

"Quit it, Mac," I interrupted. "If you haven't got anything better to talk about, let's sit quiet."

He bent to tuck the buffalo robe beneath his knees. That moment I heard a sound, a movement. We looked up together, and saw Sinapis leap out of the sleigh and dash across the snow with the wild motions of a maniac: this man whom we supposed was unconscious and too weak to lift his head—here he was running like an athlete, a man hunted by death, and looking for a place to hide himself. He had been a trapper of beasts, a hunter, all his life, and now he was running

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with the strength lent him by madness, running from the grisly trapper who sought his life.

"Man!" groaned MacDonald. "I wish it warn't so lonesome."

"You're scared, Mac?" I said hoarsely.

"Aye," he said. "I've got it down my back. Same with you," he shouted. "If it warn't for the red lights, your face would be as white as pudding. You ha' your eyes shut."

"If I could shut them, I would," was my answer.

"He'll never get out o' sight. He'll run and run all night, and we'll sit and watch. Man, I'd like a good black British night."

Sinapis ran on, and as I gazed, unable to remove my eyes, his direction changed, and his motion became parallel with us; he seemed to be coming back, but it was not so; he passed, giving us a wide berth, and sped on, old MacDonald's head following his course, sheep-like. We perceived he was running in a circle of which we formed the centre.

"Run out and catch hold of him. I'll see him running to the end of my days," MacDonald whispered.

I shuddered, but did not move.

"We were angels a while ago, church-window paintings wi' holy colours round our heads. Now we're devils. Who was that fellow who went to hell and saw the papists burn?"

"Don't know," I muttered, never having heard of Dante in those days; and I was also angry, being myself a Catholic—as was Sinapis—and I did not like MacDonald's sneers at my religion.

"Bunyan or Gulliver; some such name," he

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rambled on. "If ever I go back to Tobermorey, I'll tell 'em I've been there, too."

Again the Indian approached us, on another and smaller circle, and again he passed, but his speed was decreasing. We thought his strength was failing, but it was not that altogether. He went on describing circles, each drawing him nearer to us, and presently he fell on the snow and began to crawl.

"Played out," muttered MacDonald.

"Come on, Mac," I said, when I saw the poor wretch beginning to describe another circle on his hands and knees.

"Bide a wee. My breath ain't easy."

A few more minutes passed, then I shook off the cold and the terror of the ghastly lights, crossed to MacDonald's side, and heaved him up. He came to his feet with as many groans as a dying man; together we crossed the snow and secured the Indian; but we let him go again and gasped.

Before leaving the sleigh, some mood of madness had provoked him to tear off his socks and moccasins; and he had been running over that red snow—I do not know how long—with bare feet.

He made no resistance. We carried him to the sleigh and wrapped him up, averting our eyes from those wax-like feet, then returned to our sleeping-bags by the fire, glancing across at each other, afraid to speak for some time; but I heard a lot of gulping going on, and at last a queer hoarse voice, "Man, you're a Christian, and I used to be. Shall we put a bullet through his head? What's the sin, when 'tis a kindness?"

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"Quit it, Mac," I said; and he put his head down and took to his pipe again.

We could do nothing for Sinapis; only sit there and doze and wait for him to die. My eyes closed after a time, and I felt myself nodding, almost overbalancing. Suddenly I became wide awake, with a wild shudder, for I imagined something was leaning over, reaching out great hands to strangle me. I saw the red lights, and my excited imagination made me believe I saw also luminous faces revolving in one of those hideous circles, gradually advancing towards me with hollow eyes and bleeding jaws. I thought of Indian legends which I had laughed at when the sun was shining and Nature had been normal; and then I heard a low, dull, scraping sound which woke me up.

MacDonald had heard it too, but was not frightened. He wagged his head and grinned across the fire. He was nearer the sleigh than I was, and I supposed he could see what was going on.

"When a man's dying he gets a child again," he muttered. "The boy's having a game. He's sawing a bit of wood."

Neither of us wondered what was taking place in that wild, unhappy mind, struggling against its destiny of death, what agony was there, what love of life and home. He was only an Indian; we looked upon him rather as a dog, and were sorry he was about to die, chiefly because it would inconvenience us.

"I was fond of sawing a bit of wood when I was a youngster," MacDonald murmured lazily. "Specially if 'twas the Sabbath. I'd get father's

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hand-saw and scrape for an hour at some log, and call myself a mighty fine carpenter when I saw what a pile of sawdust I was making. Eh, man, it was good to be a kiddie."

He went on murmuring a little, and as I watched his lips something appeared to cross my eyesight and strike MacDonald on the head. It was not my fancy, for he shouted, "The boy's thrown a chunk of wood at me." Then he yelled, "It's a moccasin"; and the next instant started up and lurched towards me blubbering.

"Man!" he panted. "Take it away. It moves! Eh, man, it's a dead lump. He threw it away like an old boot. Take it away—my stomach's gone. Eh, man, man!"

I saw the thing lying in the light of the fire with the toes pointing towards it. Sinapis could have felt nothing while he sawed, because all feeling had been frozen out, and yet it was horrible—there. I could not move with MacDonald hanging to me; I dreaded the idea of touching the thing; but two of the dogs made for it, sniffing, one quicker than the other carried it away, and—we saw it no more.

MacDonald was like an hysterical girl. I made him lie down, covered him over, then went to the side of the sleigh, looking down upon the sick man, but not at his feet. He had fallen back, the mad strength had given out at last, he was breathing with difficulty, and still struggling, not only against madness and disease, but, as I could not help thinking, for I was more than a little upset, he was still striving to avoid the clutches

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of some invisible power, other than death, which hovered above his resting-place.

I sat down again, while MacDonald's groans died gradually away. I never slept. I nodded dreamily, all the time conscious of my companion's terrified eyes peering at me over the bowl of his pipe, through a continually rising cloud of smoke. Nothing could have frightened MacDonald from his pipe. He was a hard smoker, and used to say the only thing he had against sleep was that it deprived a man of his tobacco. I remained conscious of what was taking place around, and I perceived that whiteness was gradually returning to the snow and the fire was dying out of the sky. Luminous clouds, with swords of light flashing round the edges, moved slowly up; streamers quivered in the north, lengthening or shortening as the whim seized them. Falling back and resting my head against a pile of wood, I watched the strange forms, which were never for a moment at rest, hurrying always from one side to another, until it occurred to me that the prevailing movement was that of descent. These cloud spirits in their diaphanous robes of light, were inclined to leave the sky vault, to drop down towards us, to wrap us in their fleecy raiment, and carry us away to that land beyond the ice mountains, towards which men are always struggling, which they never have reached.

I had laughed, before that night, at the foolishness of the Indians. When these lights are bright, they will creep from their tents, uplift their arms towards the descending masses, cry aloud, then

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hurriedly re-seek the partial shelter of their homes. Why? Because at the sound of the human voice the descending motion ceases. The lights break up, scatter and flee away to all parts of the heavens, removing themselves until the atmosphere ceases to vibrate with the echo of the voice. Then they steal down once more, flock together in a ghostly band, and begin again to drop towards the brown tents.

"Should we not do this," says the native, "should we refrain from shouting with our voices, the spirits would descend, draw us away, and bear us to the land of the unmelting snow; for spirits drink the blood of mortals."

Wild thoughts such as these coursed through my brain as I lay in a half somnolent state. The luminous clouds were descending with steady movements. They appeared larger, and a fire might now be perceived burning within the heart of each. Down, still down, nearer and closer, until my blinking eyes discovered long attenuated limbs, loosely robed, with hooked, blood-stained extremities working towards their prey. Still down, and the cloak fell aside. Hideous faces peered forth, malignant eyes revolving like red-hot wheels, huge mouths with gruesome fangs gnashing for a victim. But no other features, except ears, long and pointed, held erect for sounds of human life. I struggled to free myself, but an unseen power held me chained. It was the devil's hunt, and these were his hounds. They were in full cry and we were the quarry. But which was it to be? It must be the one who failed to send the cry ringing forth into the night.

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Again I struggled, still the hand crushed me to the icy ground. MacDonald was bending over me, a pitying smile upon his face, on his lips the words:

"So, you are the chosen. Well, I am sorry; but I warned you against the death lights. You see, they have proved too strong, after all."

There my dream was broken by a cry. I started up with dry throat, my body shivering with cold and the horror of the vision. As I dragged myself up, those grim lights darted swiftly away, and the next second were hurrying across the heavens, whispering in triumph, as though they had succeeded in their quest and were not returning empty-handed.

I heard MacDonald's voice, but when I turned, my fear came back.

"What is it, Mac? Did I scare you?"

"You!" he cried, in a high-pitched voice. "How could ye scare any one, lying dead asleep?"

"Didn't I cry out?"

"You never made a sound. He did. He shouted one word."

"What?"

"*Mascha*—go away! A nice thing to say with his last breath."

"His last breath?"

"Man, look at him!" he cried fiercely. "Don't lie there. Go and look at the boy."

I rose, though my knees shook. I made my way to the side of the sleigh, through a ring of snoring dogs. I bent over the side, and looked upon the brown face which stared up surrounded by a frost-covered pile of furs.

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Sinapis was dead.

Morning came at last, the sun glittered upon the snow plains, dispelling the unnatural colours of the night. As the day was only of a few hours' duration we had to make the most of it. When it was time for departure, we came to a disagreement concerning the disposal of the body. We had stripped away the furs, applying them to our own use, and the figure lay beneath the pines, stretched out straight and stiff, frozen by the inexorable cold into a mass as solid as a block of marble. I had touched the dark face with the tip of an unprotected finger, scraping away a line of ice-crystals, and in doing so froze the skin with that contact against the inanimate stone—I could not call it flesh.

Macdonald, superstitious to the end of his nails, though brave enough now that it was day, averred that he would not travel in such ghastly company. On the other side, I declared it would be an act of wickedness to leave the body behind, seeing that Sinapis had been a Christian, and therefore deserved a proper burial. There happened to be a priest near the fort, and as the body would keep for ever in that temperature, I argued that it was our duty to take it back. But MacDonald waxed wrathful.

"Plant him in the snow right here, and have done with it."

"What's left of Sinapis is going back with us, if only for the sake of satisfying Armstrong. So it's no good you talking," I said firmly.

At length, being Britishers, we compromised. The body was to follow us, lashed upon a little

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sleigh, which we improvised out of pine branches and attached to the back of our own. Even so MacDonald was uncomfortable, and continually glanced over his shoulder to satisfy himself that the body was, as he expressed it, "keeping dead."

During that short day we travelled swiftly over the dusty snow, approaching our journey's limit. Still we saw scarcely any game, although wolves and foxes grew more plentiful; nor could we discover any mark of moccasin, no trellis-work pattern where the snowshoe had pressed, no parallel grooves where runners had passed. Onward we swept towards the endless ice-fields, swifter as afternoon grew, for the bed was solid; and along our trail bounded the stone-like image of the frozen man.

That night we encamped in the open. At least, there were banks of firs on all sides as wind breaks, but we made our fire in a space at the bottom of a slight dip, which we found to be natural and not a freak of the snow. The first thing was to isolate ourselves from our companion, so we unlashed the figure, dragged it over the ridge, and left it stiffly stretched upon its bier of pine branches in the valley beyond, out of sight, yet not more than seventy-five yards away. We had supper, commenced our tobacco and conversation, the latter of which did not continue long, since we had little of a pleasant nature to talk about, and were both tired.

A more beautiful sight I have rarely witnessed than the calm splendour of that night. White light poured over the dark summits of the pines, making their silvery tresses flash like a woman's hair with diamonds in it. When the great moon appeared,

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with a stately movement, the snow plains looked as soft and warm as a bed of feathers, and, opposite, the shivering arch of the aurora was a thing of beauty, not, as on the former night, a thing of horror. Silver streamers darted from the arch, illumining the sky with narrow bands; and countless spindles, dwindling away to nothingness, moved slowly, lengthening and shortening, one springing from the side of another.

I lay in a fine drowsy comfort, wrapped up to the eyes, in the sleigh. I heard the dogs snarling. I could see MacDonald endeavouring to clear the stem of his pipe, which was blocked, and smiled lazily when I perceived his lips moving, as he silently cursed his best friend. I watched the frost crystals dancing joyously everywhere. I followed the course of sparks carried from the keenly burning fire, and regretfully considered that I might have to bestir myself in an hour or so to haul in more fuel. There was not a breath of wind. I watched the tops of the pines for ten minutes together, in the hope of seeing some motion, but I could not declare I ever saw one stir an inch. I might have been gazing upon a panorama.

My brain was active, and passed rapidly from one subject to another. I wondered how many men in the course of the world's history had crossed the spot where we then rested. I tried to imagine the surroundings when this inhospitable land was a tropical country, infested by monsters now nothing more than skeletons, and tried to guess what the next change would be, when men had dug up all the vegetation of the coal period. My next idea

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was to guess at the nearest human beings. There would be Esquimaux along the bay, perhaps two hundred miles east by north, but closer might probably be found a wandering band of Swampy Crees. Finally I spared a thought for the silent figure in the valley. I had trusted Sinapis, for he was somewhat of an exception to the rule that a Christian Indian is sure to be an unprincipled rogue. He was an excellent hunter, and more than once had led me along the fresh trail of the moose; he was a good servant, rarely shirking his duties unless liquor came in his way. Now he had finished his life in the remote north, very far from cities and learning: he had been dragged into the vortex of the unknown: perhaps at that moment he knew of more mysteries than the wisest of us have ever dared to guess at.

It was not wonderful, in such a place, at such a time, that my last thoughts should turn towards sentiment, as I sank imperceptibly into slumber, but I am certain this insensibility was of short duration, and of the nature of a dog sleep, for my senses were active, and alive to every sound or motion.

So I became presently convinced that I had for some little time been listening to a scuffling noise, probably at no great distance, although in that abnormally clear atmosphere a sound would travel for miles. The moon was well up in the heavens, and looked down upon us coldly. An unearthly cry certainly rang in my ears; then a shadow fell upon the snow. I looked up and saw a tawny owl, with big horns and round eyes. He wheeled down, flapped his great wings, and glided away.

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I was half awake only, yet there surely were sounds in the valley adjoining. Bodies in motion, pattering of feet upon crisp snow, stealthy glidings and whisperings. I pulled myself upright to listen more intently. And, as I did so, an awful cry burst forth, rending the still night air like a trumpet blast, every syllable of the message beating with accompanying echo in my ears:

"*Siphaytay! mascha!*"

The silence that followed was worse than the voice. I shook like a man with ague, my teeth went chattering together, my heart thumped furiously. I heard a gasp, as though some one was choking. Then I managed to look round at MacDonald.

His face was all manner of colours, and his hands were beating together in a fashion that might have been ludicrous at any other time. I could no longer doubt that those words had been spoken, or rather shouted, in appeal to us; and who could have given them utterance except the grim figure of the frozen man?

It was no use trembling there, waiting for the cry to be repeated; but it is a curious fact that when a man is really frightened he imagines himself safer while he remains quiescent. The act of motion suggests a challenging of unseen powers. However, I spoke, though there was a tremor in my voice which had a savour of cowardice.

"You heard, Mac?"

It was a foolish remark, but it opened a way between us.

He came shambling towards me, on hands and

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knees, grabbing hold of my arm when he reached the side of the sleigh.

"I told ye 'twould be bad travelling wi' that. I knew the boy wouldn't rest. He'll be running now, running round and round."

"What's the matter with it?"

"How can a body frozen through and through scream out? 'Twas his voice, but scared and crazy. Mascha was his last word. He said it because he was afraid to die."

"His body is in danger." I tumbled out of the sleigh. "Come, Mac, we must see what he wants. He was calling to us. He was telling them to leave his body alone."

"Telling who?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps he's not dead. Perhaps the frost is keeping his—what do you papists call it?"

"His soul from departing."

"Aye, something that way."

"We must go and look."

"Let's keep hold of your arm. The fear isn't so bad when you halve it up wi' another. The Lord only knows what devilry the boy may be up to."

We ascended the incline with slow steps, both of us dreading to look down from the top of the ridge.

"'Twas his own voice. Just the voice he used when he was scared," muttered MacDonald, nearly pulling me down with his weight.

We neared the summit, a few more steps and the ridge would have been surmounted; when, without a note of warning, the cry darted out into the night,

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and we both sank upon our knees to the ground, shivering, awe-struck:

"*Siphaytay! mascha!*"

"Come away!" wailed MacDonald, catching at my legs as I tottered up, and bringing me down again. "There are things we can't look at. Come back and hitch up the dogs, and let's get away. He's running—I know he's running."

I fought with my breath, which was like a flame of fire. "We can stand it now, Mac. We're ready for it. Another two steps and we shall see."

I pulled him up, but he didn't hang to my arm. He clapped both hands to his ears. In this fashion we crossed the ridge, but when I looked down on the valley my courage returned, while the same word fell from the lips of us both:

"Wolves!"

A score or so round the motionless figure of the frozen man, hungrily struggling to tear that marble flesh. One part of the mystery was explained.

"Come away down, Mac," I cried. "There's nothing to fear."

My companion recovered wonderfully when he perceived that the dead man was not running. He raised his great voice, bellowed lustily, and we floundered into the valley, while the animals sullenly dispersed.

Sinapis lay just as we had left him, upon his back, the face, covered with glittering frost, gazing up at the white moon, the scanty garments torn into shreds by the fangs of the wolves. There was nothing to tell us how that cry had been uttered. We could only wonder, as so many had done before

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us, trying in vain to tear away the veil which hangs between us and the mystery of death.

Each of us took an end of rope, and we retraced our steps to the camp fire dragging the bier and left it not far behind us in a position of safety away from the heat. This task accomplished, we settled in the sleigh, tucked ourselves up, and presently MacDonald said, "We'll make for home first thing, and we won't take him with us."

I had weakened in my resolution. "Perhaps we'd best leave him. We'll bury him as decently as we can."

"Aye," he said. Then there was silence again.

"I'm not religious, though I quote Scripture," MacDonald confessed. "'Tis a habit merely. I'd like to understand it. 'Twould help a man."

"It's beyond us, Mac. Folks used to say the soul of a dead man couldn't rest unless the body was properly buried. If the wolves had torn Sinapis to pieces, the funeral would never have taken place. They would say that the spirit, which must have been looking after the body, used the power of human speech for the purpose of appealing to us."

"He never did—not us. He was calling out to any one."

"Well, it came to the same thing. It told us the body required help, and we were the only ones who could give it."

"I guess you're right," he said. "Anyway, 'tis no use my disagreeing, for I've not your education."

This from MacDonald was a great concession.

"There's nothing to keep us out longer," I observed.

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"We'll start back in the morning, first thing. Armstrong can do all the talking he likes. The furs have left this district, and as for those trappers, they never did have any existence outside of a lie——"

"*Siphaytay! mascha!*"

We sprang up with a yell, for this shock was worse than the first. The voice was so close, the tones were so distinct and agonised. During that first moment I felt sure the body must have moved, and, when I turned, gave a gasp of relief at not seeing the awful face of the frozen man at my shoulder. As for MacDonald, I was afraid he had gone off his head, for he danced in front of me, gesticulating wildly.

"O Lord! O Lord! It cut all round me like a whip."

The scuffling noise came again, but this time accompanied by angry barks and snarls.

Again we found a partial explanation. Now it was the dogs who had made an attack upon the frozen body. As I reached out my hand for the whip, I saw one of the leaders, a tremendous brute, standing upon the dead man's chest, licking the icy face with his great tongue. The next moment he sprang back with a howl as the thong struck him across the head. A few more strokes, and the rest of the ravenous pack were driven off.

I pulled the frozen man to the side of the sleigh and tumbled him in, unassisted by MacDonald, who refused to approach the mysterious remains. Then I sat down beside it and watched until morning. Better a loss of sleep than any repetition of that horrible cry.

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And in the raw red light of the dawn we buried him. Hitching up the dogs, we drove to a thick bluff, south of our encampment. Here we found a snow hill, crested by a lofty dome like a miniature cathedral, with dark rounded columns of pines stretching away in a kind of religious darkness. With our axes we cut a deep hole, laid the frozen man in his resting-place, a strange dark figure in the midst of perfect whiteness, then piled the snow, like inodorous flowers, upon the unquiet body.

Before leaving, I felt it my duty to commend the dead Indian to the safe keeping of Providence as best I could, although I was well aware MacDonald was eyeing me askant and often grunting. When I concluded he muttered, "Man, I can beat that," flopped down upon the snow, and began to pour forth a long recitation, which, as far as I could make out, was nothing but a rebuke to me and others of my creed, until I became very cold and weary. At length he rose, and said to me proudly, "Never repeated myself. I could have gone on for half an hour."

We turned from that quiet pine bluff and the dome of snow which protected the remains of Sinapis. Again we glided over the plains to the music of the sleigh bells, but now we were on the homeward trail, travelling at full speed over the dazzling plain, with a cold sun above and loneliness on every side. Home! The word had a pleasant sound after what we had undergone. Even though it was nothing better than a solitary log-built fort in the centre of a frozen land.

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VIII

DREAMS

I

I HAD been reared from childhood on a Canadian farm, and had grown up a son of the plains, with a practical knowledge of agriculture, which, to tell the truth, I had little love for; skilful in hunting, which was always a delight from the time when I was able to sit upon a horse and was accounted old enough to be trusted with a gun; but very ignorant, I fear, in the ways of the world, and in all the accomplishments of the soft-handed side of humanity. At the age of twenty I received an appointment in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. I left my parents without reluctance, indeed gladly, for I had a strong desire to get away and find my own place in the world. It never occurred to me that I was unnatural when I admitted I did not love my parents, had not even the smallest respect for them. Ever since my earliest boyhood a troublesome voice was always suggesting that I was different from them, in spite of all affinities of flesh and blood: I was a stranger in sympathies if not in name—that was my fixed idea, and so I parted from them without regret. I came to my lonely post in the north, where I was happy. The life suited my nature. It was

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rough, certainly, very rough and wild; but then, as I reminded myself with somewhat unnecessary frequency, I had never known anything better.

My thirtieth year arrived, and with it a year's leave of absence. I had a good supply of money: there was no opportunity for squandering in the north, and I had traded on my own account. I could travel and enlarge my mind. I had no wish to revisit the prairie home or to see my parents, who had always been kind to me in their rough western fashion. On the first cold day in the fall of the year came the factor, who was to take my place. He was an Englishman, a Londoner. I had never seen him before.

"You're off, eh?" he said in his hearty manner. "Good luck to you, lad. Wish I was in your place. Where are you going?"

I told him of my difficulty: how that I had desired to see more of the world and my fellow-creatures, but did not know which direction to take. What I did not mention was my longing to visit some great city, and to see with my own eyes, not the crowds of workers, nor the traffic, but the aristocracy of which I seemed to have heard and read; those wonderful men and women whose names appeared in the newspapers; people who did no work and yet lived sumptuously. I was ashamed to mention that I was consumed with the vulgar longing to see a lord.

"What!" exclaimed the factor, "you a Canadian? Directly I saw you I put you down for a fellow-countryman."

"I was born and brought up on the prairie," I

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told him. "I have never travelled, except from my home to here. I mean to travel now."

The other looked at me with a queer sort of smile and eyes that were doubtful. "I can usually tell the born Englishman at a glance. If you're a Canadian, I'm a Dutchman."

"That's what you are this time," I said.

"Well, we all make our mistakes," he said. "If only I had your leave, how I would hurry home to London!"

An echo rang round me with something like a familiar sound when he uttered the name. I reflected for a moment. That great city of the world—why should I not go there? I mentioned the idea to my companion that evening, and found him readily responsive. We talked until past midnight, while he described for my benefit the streets, the squares, the different sights, and the beauty of the city that he was exiled from and the home that he loved. I listened with an eagerness as great as his own, for there came glimpses of intelligence to my brain when I saw, or thought I saw—perhaps by the gift of second sight through his mind—the scene he was endeavouring to depict. He was telling me of the principal thoroughfares and of the places they led to.

"At the end of Oxford Street, on the left-hand side, you will see the Park. You must go there, Inkster."

"Yes," I said hurriedly, to get the words out before the vision faded. "Through the white arch, where children with their nurses——"

"Here, stop!" he interrupted. "Who said anything about the arch?"

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"You must have. Didn't you mention it just now?"

My companion looked at me more doubtfully than ever. "I knew I was right," he said. "You are as much of a Canadian as I am."

II

It was the end of October, and a wet evening, when the train brought me into London, and I stood a lonely, frightened being upon the platform of Euston Station. I was bewildered and trembling with nervousness. People surged past, elbowing their way, always hurrying and talking incessantly. I stood aside to let them pass, and in doing so came in the way of others, who jolted and stared at me openly. "A foreigner!" I heard one exclaim, apparently indifferent whether I heard or not. Once I went to an exit, but when I saw the stream of pedestrians and heard the shouts of boys with armfuls of papers, I shrank back. I could not face that seething throng of hurrying humanity, after a life spent in solitude on the western plains and among the forests of the north. At length a man, who seemed more of my own station in life, came up and addressed me. I moved away, but when he asked me again if I had any luggage, I plucked up courage and answered him. I explained my position to this porter, as I found he was called, placed myself in his hands, and had no cause to regret it. He gave me some good advice, and told me where I could obtain a comfortable lodging close at hand.

A week was more than sufficient to convince me

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that there is no place in the world so lonely as a big city. When I had grown accustomed to the crowd I went long walks, not aiming at any particular point, but merely following the thoroughfare. I was not surprised to find myself absolutely alone; that was inevitable, because I had no friends and was a foreigner; but what did amaze me was the absence of any fellowship between the citizens, every man walking as if he despised others; and even the loafers and those in rags apparently hostile to those who were in the same condition as themselves. There was hardly a sign of friendship in this crowded world of a few acres, which was so much more dreary than my lonely station in the north. This city, I was assured, represented the height of civilisation, and yet wherever I went I perceived hunger and distress, such as I could not have supposed existed anywhere: I saw poverty and disease which savages are free from; I saw conditions of living which my own Indians would have rebelled against. I did not look for these things, I would gladly have avoided them, but they were forced upon me. I was told I was in the midst of stupendous wealth, and yet I was confronted with this ghastly poverty; men falling upon the streets for lack of food, and poor women selling their virtue to get a living. I was looking upon civilisation for the first time, and I found it a gaunt and bloodless object, spending its wealth in drink to forget its sorrows, coughing with consumption, clothed in rags, and infested with vermin.

Although never particularly robust, I was a healthy man, able to tramp day after day through

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the forests, without suffering any undue fatigue. Therefore I was dismayed to find that a stroll of even an hour's duration through this London made me tired, sometimes exhausted. Several times I returned early in the evening to my lodgings and went to bed, feeling thoroughly ill. At last I visited a doctor, who advised me to leave the hotel in the Euston Road, where I had been staying since my arrival, and find a lodging in some healthier locality. "There is nothing much the matter," he said. "The atmosphere of London does not suit you. It does not suit the majority of us, but we are compelled to live in it; but we are accustomed to breathe smoke, and you are not. You are inclined to be neurotic, therefore pure air is in your case indispensable."

A symptom of my indisposition was heavy sleep, troubled during the waking moments by dreams; and when I found myself in more comfortable quarters, near the Edgware Road, though my health improved slightly, these dreams not only remained, but increased. I could not shake them off with sleep; they accompanied me by day, but only when I visited Hyde Park, or certain streets and squares of the district known as the West End. If I went to central London, or into the City, I became free from them. I could walk in St. James's Park, for instance, without being troubled, but the moment I came upon the road, or into any part of the numerous paths, lying between the great statue of Achilles and the Marble Arch, my dreams returned. The nurses and children, the little chairs under the trees, the carriages gliding to

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and fro, the well-dressed people, were all, not exactly familiar, but to a certain extent recognisable. I had seen them before, though it could only have been in dreams.

In the same way, when I wandered through that wonderful district of great solemn squares, I felt myself indifferent in some and dreaming in others. No doubt they impressed me, as great buildings do impress men who have lived always in the wilds, and it was possible that some, by their general aspect and suggestion of loneliness, were capable of impressing me more than others; but in one or two I would linger often, gazing at the houses, as if there was some message written upon their doors or windows, for me to read if I could; and whenever any person stepped from one of these houses, I would hide my face and hurry away, as if afraid of being recognised by some phantom of my dreams.

One night—it was early spring and warm—I was returning to my lodgings. I came suddenly into one of these vast and apparently deserted squares, the solemnity of which sent a feeling of awe through me. Several clocks had just chimed midnight, slowly, one after the other, as though time were a thing of little account. Half-way across I encountered an elderly gentleman, walking with the aid of a stick, and followed by two dogs, who sometimes looked back and growled. When he saw me he moved in my direction, and to my wonder spoke:

"Can you see over there? My eyes are not strong now. I think there is a human figure lying

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there. Can you see it? Perhaps I am mistaken."

He stood and pointed with his stick towards the iron railings running round the garden enclosure that formed the centre of the square. The shadows were dark and heavy, as the place was ill-lighted; but when I strained my eyes they clearly distinguished a huddled shape lying against the railings.

"I brought out my dogs for a little walk," the old gentleman went on. "One of them growled and drew my attention to that thing. I do not like to go near it. I am an old man, and I am afraid of it."

I crossed the road, bent over the figure, and discovered a dissolute old man. I shook him gently by the shoulder. He turned with an effort, and as he struggled in vain to rise, I saw a wild and dissipated face, terribly marked with lines, sharp-featured, with small cunning eyes, the whole set within sparse threads of white hair. He was well-dressed, a gentleman in name, if not in deed, for he was plainly intoxicated. I put my hands under his arms, and dragged him upright. He stood beside me, swaying and clutching feebly at the iron bars for support, a spectacle of miserable and dishonoured old age. We were alone together, in the great solitude of the square, in the midst of that weird district, and we looked at each other as well as we could. I was not dreaming then, nothing upon that abandoned old face made me wonder why my mind was troubled. He had no place in the Park or the squares.

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I had no memory of meeting with his like in dreamland.

The dim rays of a lamp fell across my face, and made a white mask of his. The features became suddenly altered as though by fear.

"Stephen!" he muttered thickly. "Stephen come back. Stephen is dead. It is a dream. He! he! he! It's another of my dreams."

He was partially sobered, and lurched away from me, until he disappeared in the darkness. I could hear for some time his trembling voice as he hurried to get away from me; and when my own footfalls aroused the echoes of the silent square, the whole scene was changed, the message written upon the great houses became almost legible, the thing which had been asleep in me awoke, and whispered, telling me that the face I had just looked upon, that deeply-marked face with its cunning features, had looked upon mine before that night, although at the moment I had not been able to recognise it; that during some hour of those thirty years of my life, those eyes had been near mine—but where? Had he not mentioned dreams? He was right. It was there we had met; we had passed and spoken in that mysterious region, and he had come to the waking life with a dim remembrance of my features; and through his recognition of me, as a passer-by in the land of sleep, my eyes had been opened, and had admitted his white old face into the portrait-gallery of those who had come and gone by in the night.

I went on haunting the region of silent squares.

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By that time I had acquired the habit of visiting a certain tavern, finding my loneliness intolerable, and having discovered that a man in civilisation without friends, must, if he requires society, seek for it in the drinking-places. I had forced myself upon one of the habitués of this house, a man of middle-age, who appeared to be well-read upon almost every subject. One night we were discussing practical magnetism and its possibilities, a deeply interesting question to me. Engrossed in argument, I did not take particular note of the flight of time, and was surprised, when I glanced up at the clock, to discover that it was past the hour of midnight. I prepared to depart, but at that moment heard a shuffling footfall. I saw my companion cease from his occupation of rolling a cigarette. I turned, and beheld the figure of an old man leaning helplessly against the bar counter, speaking thickly to the young woman in charge, demanding, I imagine, more liquor. Again, I will not say for the second time, I saw the thin white hair, the care-lined face, the wild eyes and cunning features of the man I had assisted in the lonely square. Again I felt stirring within me, induced, perhaps, by the glamour of time and place, a dim impression of remembrance.

"Do you know him?" asked my companion, when he noticed where my eyes were fixed.

I told him briefly of my former experience.

"You don't know his name?"

"No," I said.

"I can tell you. He is a well-known character round these places. They say his servants won't

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let him have wine or spirits when he's at home, so he comes out and goes from bar to bar until closing time. His name makes him notorious. He is Lord S——."

"Is that a fact?" I asked. "Or is the title assumed?"

"It is his own. His life and history are common knowledge in this part of the town. He was a thoroughly bad lot when young, always getting into debt and other difficulties. His elder brother, the heir of course to the title, was a generous fellow and usually helped him out. About a year after the death of the old Earl, we heard that Lord S——, this one's brother, had been lost during a yachting trip. This creature, who had done quite enough to disgrace the family name, succeeded."

"His brother died unmarried?" I asked.

"No; but his married life was a short one. His wife died when their only child, a son, was about three years old, while the boy died in infancy, and opened the way for this profligate. Look at him now; a hopeless dipsomaniac."

Lord S—— turned, his bony hands shaking, and the fingers curved like the talons of some beast. He looked me full in the face with his small vindictive eyes, until I felt stirring within me an inexplicable hatred for this dissipated, broken old man.

"He's the last of the family," said my companion. "He will die unmarried and without issue."

"Stephen!" cried the old lord, in his thin voice. "Where's Stephen? I thought I saw him just

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now. He must have been waiting at the corner of the square to speak to me, but when I get there he's always gone. He gets tired of waiting. Poor Stephen!"

"That's his mania," said the voice beside me. "He calls every one that speaks to him 'Stephen.' It was his brother's name."

The place closed, and we left for our homes. I bade good-night to my friend, and began to walk towards my lodging; but I heard a faint cry and stopped. A fine rain had been falling all the evening, and the pavement was smeared and slippery. I saw an unsteady figure close beside me, swaying and lurching from side to side. In my compassion for age and incapacity, I put out my hand and held him up. He seized my arm and hung to it.

"I'm come, Stephen," he said thickly. "I knew you'd be waiting for me. We'll go home now."

I tried to shake him off, but he clung to me like a mollusc to a rock. We stood near the kerb, and a cab came swiftly out of the shadows.

"Here y'are, my lord," cried the driver. "All right, sir," he said reassuringly to me. "I know all about 'is lordship's complaint. Driven 'im 'ome many a night, I 'ave. Put 'im in, sir."

Again I tried to release myself, but again in vain. He clutched at me, and cried like a child. "Don't leave me, Stephen," he whined. "They come after me every night. They want to kill me."

I was compelled to enter the cab. We drove along through the silent streets, the old man

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rambling in incoherent fashion at my side. Lights flashed up and disappeared; revellers shouted at each other, until we came to an apparently deserted quarter where there was only a policeman strolling along his beat. The whole scene was visionary; the action that of a dream. We rolled into a square, more solemn and weird, to my mind, than my forest station on the Saskatchewan, and I was at home at last.

Here my dream burst out of the fog and became reality. This square, so like many of the others, was yet wholly different: it stood out by itself; even the railings and lion-headed knockers on the doors and the stone steps were all different and well known, for my eyes had seen them often, as it were in the dim spiritual state of another life before ever I had been born into the world as the son of a Canadian farmer. That street at the corner, where the lamp stood, and the policeman paced slowly turning the light of his lantern down the area—there I leaned forward, and looked to see the shop just off the square. What shop? I was murmuring, and soon I knew: the shop of flowers, where a faint gaslight would be struggling through a bank of blooms, making a child's paradise. I saw no shop; the dream was wrong; but the cab moved on, I saw the other side of the street, and, I believe, cried out; for the shop was there, dimly lighted, the flowers banked against the glass just as I had seen them in my dream; only the happy child was not there.

"Wait and take me back," I muttered to the cabman, for the rain was coming on.

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I assisted Lord S—— to alight, helped by the policeman, who came forward as though it was an ordinary nightly duty. We climbed up the steps, and hardly had I knocked upon the great door when it opened, and a flood of electric light in the hall dazzled my eyes after the dim glow of the street lamps.

A butler admitted us; a man older than his master, but unlike him, for he was a gentleman, and his condition was that of hale and hearty old age. He stooped slightly, and was a little near-sighted—a fact I discovered when he peered at me closely, doubtless with a view to finding out who it was that had brought his master home. He did not speak, but turned to pay the cabman and give the policeman his customary fee, and to close the door; while I stood stunned, then moved as if I had been the drunkard, with my heart beating wildly, my throat dry, and my eyes burning in their sockets like hot coals. When I parted my lips, to explain my presence to the old butler, I uttered no word, and all that proceeded from my mouth were sounds such as a child might utter.

I closed my hot eyes, opened them, and looked again. The scene was the same; the scene that I had looked upon a thousand times; the house that I knew as I knew my log station thousands of miles away: the house that I had seen so often in my dreams. Here it was, all real and tangible, and unchanged. The pictures, the articles of furniture, the decorations, the wide stairway yonder, each separate door, were as familiar to me as my own small possessions. I recognised the stern faces

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that frowned at me from their dark canvases. I had looked upon them often with round eyes. That carved oak chest beside the curtain—I saw it being opened: it was full of child's toys, and I clutched at them, crowing in my glee. I saw a perambulator being wheeled across the tiled floor. Why was it there? No children laughed in that dreary house. A great clock stood half-hidden in the recess. There came over me a wild desire to press my ear against the case, that I might listen to the heavy swing of the pendulum, or to plead that the front might be removed and the works exposed to my view.

The old lord had shuffled away across the hall. He entered a room—I knew it was the dining-room, and I heard his complaining voice calling constantly, "Stephen! Stephen!"

Hardly knowing what I did—I felt as though I were moving beneath the influence of an anæsthetic—I spoke in reply and stepped forward. But I was detained. A withered hand closed round my arm; a frightened, wrinkled face, with wonder and affection dawning across its features, looked up to mine. The dim eyes were extended into a wild stare. Another voice sounded in my ears:

"Master Stephen! Master Stephen!"

It was the old butler. I turned on him sharply. "Are you both beside yourselves," I exclaimed; "you and your master?"

"Master Stephen, I knew you would come back. I have prayed to God to send you all these years. Twenty-five long years, Master Stephen. A quarter of a century we have waited for you. I knew you

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weren't dead ; I knew you would come." His voice dropped to a whisper. " He knew you would come."

He pushed me towards the dining-room with his weak, nervous hands. " Go in, Master Stephen. Go in to him. Make him do you justice. It is not too late—not too late even now. May God forgive him."

Thrill after thrill passed through me when I paused on the threshold, and then stood among the dark antique furniture, every article of which appealed mutely, and not in vain, to my awakening senses. The old lord had sunk into an armchair, the leather of which was worn and shining. I saw a child straddling across one of the great arms, while an old gentleman held him on, and cried proudly: " See! he will sit his horse well one day." A writing-table stood against the wall, and over it hung a picture, a portrait. I looked at it and cried out. Those features, that small beard, the wavy hair, the long straight nose—it was as though I were looking upon myself in a mirror, for it was my own face that I saw depicted there.

The old butler had followed, as though fearful of losing me, and when he heard my exclamation and noticed the direction of my gaze, he spoke at once.

" You know him, Master Stephen ? It was by that I recognised you. You're the same ; the very same."

" Who is it ? " I muttered.

" Don't you know, Master Stephen ? Don't you know ? No, no. I forget. You were only a baby. It's your poor father, Stephen Lord S——"

The old lord was rocking his spare figure back-

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ward and forward, kicking his shoes off, his tongue rambling incessantly. "Get out, you rascal! Go away, you scoundrel!" he cried at the butler; and the old man obeyed very slowly, casting many glances in my direction.

I came across the carpet, and touched Lord S—— upon the shoulder. He ceased his meaningless chatter, and peered up with cold, vacant eyes. It was very quiet and solemn in that old house. There was no sound except the sob of the rain.

"Which are you?" he said.

Only one answer came to my tongue: "I do not know."

The old man broke into cracked laughter, and lurched to his feet. I held his arm to prevent him falling into the fireplace.

"I call myself a Canadian, born and bred," I went on. "I thought my name was Rupert Inkster, and my profession a Factor to the Hudson's Bay Company; but to-night I have seen and heard things which make me doubt who I am. Can you understand?"

"He, he!" he laughed. "Graham is an old fool. He thinks you are Stephen—nephew Stephen. I'm an old man now. They say my brain has gone with drink, but they are all fools. Never mind, never mind. It helps me to forget."

"Forget what?"

"I'm Lord S——. They can't deny it. I've got the estate, and the title, and nobody can take them away. I thought it would be a fine thing; but there's not much in it—precious little, after all."

"Uncle!" I exclaimed, with a sudden impulse,

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yet with a great repulsion and loathing in my heart.

"No, no! That's what old Graham thinks. You're brother Stephen, not nephew Stephen. Sit down, brother. You're head of the family. You're older than I am, but, by God, you have worn better. You are Lord S——. I'm plain Archibald C——, just as I was at Cambridge. That suits me better. Eh? eh? I wasn't made for the head of a family. The father used to say that. Sit there, Stephen. I'm glad you've come from the wall to keep me company. You must find it lonely sometimes hanging on the wall. Ah, that's it—there! Didn't you always sit there when the father was alive? You want to hear about the child, don't you? Listen, and I'll tell you all about him."

I sat where he bade me. I understood that the liquor which he had absorbed for years as a salve to his conscience had deprived him of mind and reason. He had but very little control over his words and actions. I understood also that the sight of my face, so like that portrait on the wall, terrified him, and was about to make him confess, believing in his drunkenness and decay I was indeed his brother brought back from the grave.

He clawed at my knee with his bony fingers. "I can't tell you where the boy is now, Stephen, but I'll tell you what happened after you were drowned —he! he!—in the sea. I said that the boy was ill—your little baby, Stephen, little Lord S——. I got a doctor, there are plenty of 'em in London, and I have never been called stingy, Stephen. The doctor came every day for a time, and there was a

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nurse as well, very well paid, Stephen, but the boy died somehow. The doctor gave a certificate, and we buried the dummy, but I packed off the real child to a farm in Canada. He was only a baby. He wouldn't remember anything. I paid a sum down for his keep ; I did it under an assumed name, until he could make his own living. That's what I did with your little Stephen, and nobody suspects, nobody but old Graham, and he knows, the scoundrel —but he's proud of the family honour. Besides, who would take the word of a butler, when there's no evidence behind it ? "

He leaned forward, panting and chuckling at intervals. He was an old man, and as weak as the child he had once wronged ; but for all that I could have struck him as he shivered before me. My head was burning, and my brain throbbing with all the strangeness of the story.

" What of your brother ? " I said, with a great earnestness. " What of him ? "

He chuckled again, louder, more fearfully than ever. " Help me up, Stephen. I will—I will show you something."

I pulled him to his feet. He staggered across the floor, fumbling with some keys, and tried to unlock an old oak cabinet. I did it for him. A drawer within was unlocked in its turn, and he drew out an envelope. He shuddered and whined and cringed like a beaten dog.

" Turn on the lights, Stephen. I can't see," he muttered.

" There is plenty of light," I said.

" Look ! Photography is such a wonderful thing.

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I have amused my time with it. It shows us so many things now—things that we can't see with the naked eye, things that we can't imagine, things even that do not exist at all. Things that our memory makes us fear are sent to trouble us, Stephen. Photography brings 'em out. Look at this! Look at this!"

The envelope drifted to the floor. Wonderingly I caught at the photograph, as it slipped from his palsied fingers, and brought it beneath the light nearer my eyes. It represented a portion of the room in which we were standing. There was a picture, it was opposite me where I stood, a wide full-length portrait of some ancestor, reaching from the cornice almost to the floor. I could see this portrait plainly, the cracked canvas with its impression of a stern-faced man, clad after the antique fashion of a long-gone day; but surely there was something besides, something which the natural powers of human vision could never have observed, something which appealed to the mind and to conscience, something that had its being behind that picture, and beneath the paper, plaster, laths, and brickwork of the wall itself; something that may have been existent, but spoke rather as a memory and as a reproach, even as the ghost spoke to Hamlet, and using the same words.

I stared, I strained my eyes: all else was vague, indefinite, and of the nature of a dream. The photograph appealed to the imagination rather than the vision. I fancied I could discern the blurred outline of the wall. I fancied I could see into the next house of that solemn square; into another

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abode of mystery, where beings shaped like men and women moved amid strange surroundings, and spoke like creatures under the spell of some enchantment. I fancied I could see away and beyond, into the throbbing heart of savage London, where all the concentrated vice and *homicidal* passion of the weird city became typified in a mighty wheel, whirling and white-hot with the madness of its motion. All things were suggested. I saw nothing clearly, and what else I saw, or what I thought, I do not know.

"He, he, Stephen! The ghost is safe—your ghost and mine! Nothing has been touched for five-and-twenty years. 'Tis very quiet in here, though sometimes at night there's a creeping up and down the wall, and the things move and cry out. But nobody hears—nobody hears."

I dropped that photograph, and escaped from the room of dreams. In the cold shadowy hall the old butler was pacing to and fro with faltering steps.

"Master Stephen," he called tremulously. "No, no; I beg your lordship's pardon; but I cannot forget old times. Surely you can remember old Graham? I used to carry you on my back upstairs, my lord, and take you round to the stables to see the horses harnessed. I knew you were alive, my lord. I knew there had been foul play, and I prayed that I might live to see you come back and claim your own. Now you have come at last and you will not leave us again. Where are you going, my lord? Where are you going to-night?"

I stepped forward, staggering blindly, like a

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man struggling, and vainly, to escape from the terrors of a fearful dream. The door closed behind me. I reached the waiting vehicle and drove away. To this hour I do not know the number of that house, nor the name of that square.

I am home again now, back in my own place, with the murmur of the Saskatchewan river beneath, and the roar of the forest in my ears. I am satisfied, because I feel that the dreams will trouble me no more; I am happy, because I live surrounded by the wonderful nature which I understand and love. But I shall never leave my northern home again.

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IX

A COMET FOR SALE

A Comedy of the Lower and Upper Atmospheres

CHARACTERS

DOCTOR PAYNTER, Sc.D... ..	Discoverer of the Star.
PROFESSOR HANNAY, F.S.A., F.R.A.S., etc. ..	Discoverer of the Comet.
STELLA	A Heavenly body.
MRS. KING	A satellite fixed.
ROSE	A satellite, meteoric.
COMET	Parabolic.

Scene: *Paynter's Study in Zenith Gardens.* Time: *New Moon.*

PAYNTER (*discovered at writing-table burrowing among manuscripts*). Wherever is that paper upon the great nebula in Andromeda? I left the sheets lying here less than an hour ago, and now they have vanished into unknown space as completely as Hannay's Comet. That comet! Ah, that comet! Every morning I wake with a resolution to think of it no more. It enters into all my work, disturbs my sleep, ruins my whole life. In my dreams I am flashing through space tied to its tail. I was so near, so very near, to being its discoverer, and I should have succeeded that night and made

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myself famous if it hadn't been for Hannay and his phenomenal luck. Hannay's Comet! Confound Hannay! That comet was intended for me. My resolution from this day is to banish that comet from my mind. I have, however, wondered sometimes whether it would not be possible to have a friendly chat with Professor Hannay, to sound him as to the state of his affections for that comet, and to suggest that he might, for a consideration, part with it. Hannay is not wealthy. There are many people who believe that my claim is just as good as his. He might, I imagine, be induced to sell me his comet. Sometimes I feel convinced he would do so. I must try him. I will sound him. Paynter's comet! Now that sounds well, natural, astronomical. But this is not work (*resumes burrowing*). Since that child has been under my roof chaos has come again. It is a mistake for a man of science to have an affectionate nature. Science stands in the way of affection. You cannot make a jellyfish out of a fossil. Ah, here! What is this? My chart of the last transit of Venus, and, as I live, scribbled all over with rude —I might almost say offensive—remarks. That child again! And here she has scrawled a caricature of myself (*jumps up and rings the bell*). It is for this Stella has drawing lessons. Probably my monograph upon the great nebula in Andromeda is at this precise moment being converted into paper-boats. (*Mrs. King enters the system.*) Mrs. King, where is the star of my establishment?

MRS. KING. Miss Stella is in the kitchen, sir.

PAYNTER. I have told you again and again she

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is not to pass through the kitchen, nor to circle round it. Why is she shining there, and what is she doing?

MRS. KING. Clipping the kitten, sir.

PAYNTER. The servants, of course, encouraging her. Remove that smile from your countenance, if you please, Mrs. King.

MRS. KING. Her isn't 'urting the hanimal, sir. It amuses the young lady, and is keeping her quiet. You know what a way she has with her, sir. If you says "don't," her says "shall," her do, sir. Her says——

PAYNTER. Oblige me by eclipsing yourself. Send Miss Stella into perigee. And, Mrs. King, let me take this opportunity of reminding you that you are not a person of the first magnitude; and if ever I find you allowing my daughter to play with edged tools, such as scissors, or any of my geometrical instruments, there will be occultations in this system of Zenith Gardens, of which I happen to be the central light.

MRS. KING. But Miss Stella is so determined, she is, sir. If her sets her mind on a thing, sir, her does it, whatever any one says to she, and her slaps the servants' faces if they try to stop she, sir.

PAYNTER. Your pronouns, Mrs. King, are as erratic as aerolites. Stars of Miss Stella's magnitude are perfectly easy to keep under observation. They only require capable astronomical superintendence. You are a nebulous person, Mrs. King. Send Miss Stella here at once. (*Mrs. King departs from the system.*) It is to me extraordinary that women

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should be so utterly incapable of controlling the orbits of children who have the misfortune to be pretty. The thing, from a scientific point of view, is ludicrously simple. A little determination, stubborn perseverance, good instruments, and the possibilities of the problem are exhausted. To a man of science it is easy enough. A word or a frown from such a man is sufficient to awe the most infantile of human planetoids into obedience. But women spoil pretty children. They lose their calculating faculties over them, talk nonsense to them—pitiable nonsense—indulge them in every possible way, and, of course, the child's mathematical instincts and regular disposition become ruined. (*Screams in the outer atmosphere. He runs to the door, and passes into space, from whence his voice proceeds.*) There, there, sweetheart! What? Did the kitten scratch its wrist, then? Poor, pretty little wrist. Yes, it is a horrid kitten. It never, never will grow into an honest, decent cat. There! There! (*He returns to the system, with Stella sucking her wrist, and holding a kitten decorated with a paper collar.*) Let your old daddy kiss the place, darling. There now! Poor old daddy will kiss the wrist and make it well again.

STELLA. Kitty — nasty — scwatching — ugly beastly little devil, daddy.

PAYNTER. Yes, yes, darling. But it mustn't use naughty words, and it mustn't lose its little temper. Let the nasty kitten go to the dogs. Daddy will tie up the poor wrist. Where's the scratch, sweetheart?

STELLA. Somewhere 'bout here, daddy—d'eadful—awful!

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PAYNTER. I have an idea, Stella, you are beginning to develop a dangerous imagination which is already turning your mind towards the lighter forms of fiction. I want you to tell me if you have been meddling with the papers on my writing table.

STELLA. Not very often, daddy.

PAYNTER. Who gave you that paper with which you have adorned this animal?

STELLA. Picked it up.

PAYNTER. Where? In here?

STELLA. I forget. May I imagine?

PAYNTER. You are to tell the truth.

STELLA. I didn't meddle wiv your old papers. I only took the dirty sheets. I didn't touch the white ones.

(*Paynter seizes the kitten and denudes it of its collar.*)

PAYNTER. Here at last is my monograph upon the great nebula in Andromeda. All that is left of a week's work. Child, I must be firm with you. I must be resolute. You are a very naughty little girl, and you are a very mischievous little girl—and you have told me an untruth.

STELLA. But it's not Sunday.

PAYNTER. It is just as wicked to tell an untruth on a week-day.

STELLA. I can't always be good. 'Twould make me tired. If it's going to be Sunday every day, I shall soon die. You can be a bad, wicked old man when you try."

PAYNTER. Stella, you are forgetting yourself.

STELLA. Ain't.

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PAYNTER. You are not to speak like that. It is impertinent and it is ungrammatical. Now look at me and say you are sorry.

STELLA. Isn't.

PAYNTER. You are an altogether incorrigible child, and I am exceedingly sorry I ever removed you from that excellent orphanage.

STELLA. You isn't weally, daddy.

PAYNTER. I thought you would be a little angel in my house; and you are turning out a little torment.

STELLA. We're both bad, daddy. You ain't a bit better than me. T'other day, when old Monkey-face came——

PAYNTER. You are not to refer to my estimable friend and colleague, Professor Hannay, in that manner.

STELLA. You told him you was vewy glad he'd found that silly old comet, and you know you wasn't, 'cause you'd found it, too; and after he'd gone I was hiding behind the door, and I heard you say d-a-m Hannay. So you told him a big storwy, and you was awful deceitful—and you swore fearful.

PAYNTER. Hold your tongue, Stella.

STELLA. Old swearer.

PAYNTER. If you say that again I shall be compelled to punish you severely.

STELLA (*whispers*). Bad, wicked old man—you swore. (*Paynter picks up a flat ruler.*) Daddy, you won't beat me when I've got a scwatched wrist. I did tell you a storwy, but I knew you wouldn't believe me, 'cause you never do, so it

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wasn't a weal storwy. *I* never said d—a—m. Daddy, if you aren't nice, I shall tell old Monkey-face all about it. Oh, don't fwown so.

PAYNTER. Child, come here.

STELLA (*running across, holding the kitten*). Here I are, daddy.

PAYNTER (*averting his eyes*). Hold out your hand.

STELLA (*holding out the kitten's paw*). Now, Kitty, be bwave.

PAYNTER. Do as I tell you. Put out your hand.

STELLA. The scwatched one?

PAYNTER. The right.

STELLA. Daddy, it isn't fair. I never hit you—cruel old man. Are—are you going to hurt me?

PAYNTER (*irresolutely*). I hope so.

STELLA. Then I won't never, never love you any more (*crying*).

PAYNTER (*catching her in his arms*). There, there, my darling. Don't cry, sweetheart. Don't be afraid, my pretty.

STELLA. You never weally meant it, did you, daddy?

PAYNTER. No, no, dear. But Stella must be a good little girl, and never take daddy's papers off his table again.

STELLA. Dear old, almost ugly daddy!

PAYNTER. Those servants are ruining this child.

STELLA. Kiss, and say you are d'eadful sowwy.

PAYNTER. What have I to be sorry for?

STELLA. Being unkind.

PAYNTER. I have to be firm for your own sake. (*A ring heard.*) Run away and play. (*Stella goes off.*) A sweet child, although mischievous, and

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inclined to rebel against the laws of the universe. No wonder she gets over them downstairs. I trust I am not too stern—I have paid so little attention to these small bodies—but she must not be spoilt. She is a destructive element. She descends upon my work like a shower of meteors, and yet she is a mass of attractive particles. It is wonderful how she has filled this house with starlight. It was a dull world, decidedly dark and misty before she flashed into being. And now—(*a crash*)—Dear me! I hope the house has not been struck by a comet!

(*Rose passes into the system, followed by Hannay.*)

ROSE. Professor Hannay, sir.

PAYNTER. Ah, good-day to you, Hannay. (*To Rose*)—That sudden atmospheric disturbance—was it a fireball, or was it the cat?

ROSE. I will make enquiries, sir. (*Goes towards aphelion.*)

PAYNTER. Dear me! If only Cabinet Ministers could talk like housemaids. Well, Hannay, are you quite well? Jovial as ever, you most mercurial man. Take off your outer envelope and sit down. Have you obtained that spectrum of Theta Orionis yet? Yes? I thought as much. Heaven cannot keep its secrets from you. (*Hannay takes a box from his pocket.*) I see you have brought me the sun-papers. I don't know whether you observed that we enjoyed one minute and twenty-seven seconds of sunshine this morning between eight and nine? Most gratifying and unusual! (*Rose returns to perihelion.*) Well?

ROSE. Miss Stella has dropped the billiard balls through the roof of the conservatory.

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PAYNTER. Tell her—no, no, it is useless. Did she offer any explanation for her rash action?

ROSE. Miss Stella informed me that she desired to ascertain whether or no the balls would bounce.

PAYNTER. Return to the Treasury-bench and send for the glazier.

ROSE. Yes, sir. (*Leaves the system.*)

HANNAY. I am afraid I forgot the sun-papers. I will send them directly I get back. There is little chance of the sun appearing in the meantime. No, that is only a box of chocolates.

PAYNTER. Your kindly feeling for me, Hannay, has always been considerable. Am I to understand that you are now proposing to cement our friendship by the gift of a box of chocolates?

HANNAY. I thought you would permit Stella to accept them.

PAYNTER. The child at the present moment is in disgrace. She has not behaved well to-day, and only a few moments before your arrival I was compelled to chastise her with considerable severity. You are always bringing her presents. She simply possesses everything that the heart of a child can desire. She owns a regular emporium of toys. Her dolls, which I regret to notice she ignores, would make a waxworks show. I have quite recently given her a pony and cart. Only the other day you suggested making her a present of a bicycle.

HANNAY. Do you object?

PAYNTER. I do strongly object to the child's vanity being flattered. It is useless for me to be stern with her, when every one else spoils her.

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HANNAY. You are very fond of the little girl, Paynter?

PAYNTER. Decidedly, I have a feeling of tenderness for Stella. It is my duty as the deputy-author of her being. She is bright and amusing, and I suppose she is rather a taking child. Do you consider her a taking child, Hannay?

HANNAY. Why, yes, in a way. Your house has been different since you adopted her.

PAYNTER. Her influence upon other bodies, yourself for instance, is not repulsive.

HANNAY. The walk from Zodiac Square gives me exercise. Would you care to make me acquainted with the circumstances under which you discovered Stella? You have mentioned that she came from an orphanage of which you are a guardian.

PAYNTER. Upon one of my annual visits, I became atracted by—I should say my attention was drawn towards—a certain little Matilda Montgomery. I discovered that her father, a bank-clerk, who had lost his situation and fallen into dire poverty, had formerly been known to me. He died in one of the hospitals; his wife survived him only a year, and little Matilda was thrown upon charity. I felt it was my duty to provide for the child, and I determined finally to bring her up as my daughter, and call her Stella, my star—the first heavenly body that has ever been discovered in broad daylight. It is ridiculous of course, because I am old enough to be her grandfather. But the child is not yet old enough to discover anything abnormal in the supposed relationship.

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HANNAY. The star is rising.

(*Stella appears above the horizon, her hat hanging down her back, her pinafore dirty, her hands full of pansies.*)

STELLA. Daddy! Look at the monkey-faces.

PAYNTER. Very pretty, my dear.

STELLA. I don't call 'em pwetty. How do, Mister Estimable Friend and Colleague. Here is your photograph for you. (*Gives him a pansy.*)

PAYNTER. My dear, you must go and have that pinafore changed.

HANNAY. I have brought you some chocolates, Stella.

PAYNTER. She ought not to have them. The dean brought her a very orthodox bagful yesterday. Her teeth will be spoilt as well as her disposition.

STELLA. If you won't let me have them, I'll tell.

HANNAY. Tell what?

STELLA. The awful language daddy uses about your old comet, and——

PAYNTER. There, there, child. Take the chocolates, and make yourself ill.

STELLA (*to Hannay*). Shut your mouth and open your eyes—you know what I mean. (*Hannay opens his mouth, and she pops in a pansy.*)

PAYNTER. Stella, don't be rude.

STELLA. The pwofessor likes it.

HANNAY. She is quite right. There is not much fun in the lonely study of a man of science. Won't you give me a chocolate, Stella?

STELLA. Two; a big 'un and a little 'un. Don't snatch, and 'scuse dirty fingers. Greedy! you took the whoppiest. Daddy mustn't have any, 'cause

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then his teeth would be spoilt as well as his disposition. Pwofessor, daddy does conjuring wiv his teeth. Yes, weally. He can put 'em in a glass of water. (*Runs out laughing.*)

PAYNTER. As erratic as a comet.

HANNAY. As bright as Venus on a winter's evening.

PAYNTER. If you will excuse me, I will run up to the Observatory and record the reading of the anemometor.

HANNAY. By all means.

(*Hannay picks up a paper, Paynter goes to the horizon, looks back on Hannay, shakes his head doubtfully, and sets. Hannay looks round, and rises.*)

HANNAY. I wonder if I could strike a bargain with Paynter. Would he negotiate? I doubt it, for he loves the child, and yet he is as jealous as ever. He would have given one of his ears to have anticipated me in discovering the comet. I have always stood in his way. He has riches. I have luck—it must be confessed I have been lucky, but Paynter has beaten me at last; he has made a greater discovery than I have; his humanity has beaten my science. I envy Paynter his star more, I think, than he envies me my comet.

(*Stella shines out on tip-toe, with a toy drum, which she rolls suddenly.*)

STELLA. Oh, my stars! Didn't you hop! Come on! Let's have a game of cards. (*She begins to drag things off the writing-table.*)

HANNAY. Are you not disarranging the doctor's writing-materials somewhat?

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STELLA. Everything's here. Daddy can sort 'em out. (*She throws books on the floor, always laughing.*) Take those big dictionary books away, Pwofessor.

HANNAY. Really, my dear, I must not.

STELLA. If you won't help, I'll swear at you like daddy when he thinks of comets, and 'tis wicked to swear; at least, 'tis wicked for little girls, not for old men; so I shall be wicked for the twentieth time to-day—and it will be your fault, this time. Come on, pwofessor. Don't sit there and gwoan.

HANNAY. I feel certain the doctor will be greatly annoyed. (*He approaches the table and removes one book.*)

STELLA. That's right. This old table wants spring-cleaning, don't it? Hurry up! If daddy comes back all of a sudden, we shall catch it. He don't like having his things tidied. Now then, help me move the table. Oh, donkey, shove—don't pull. There, now! You've made me upset the ink! Daddy will give it you. He'll give you thistles. Here are the cards. Pwofessor, can you play bwidge?

HANNAY. I am afraid I never learnt to play cards.

STELLA. I'll teach you. I'll be gwown-up lady, and win all your money.

HANNAY. My dear little girl, we must not gamble.

STELLA. Why, stupid, everybody does.

(*Rose brings in tea-table.*)

HANNAY. You see, I am not in the fashion.

STELLA. You never will be unless you gamble. Even daddy can play now. I taught him, and I

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taught the bishop, and the dean, and they're as keen as mustard now. But they all play for love. They're so loving when they're afraid of losing their money.

HANNAY. But who taught you ?

STELLA. Oh, Rose taught me. Didn't you, Rosie ?

(*Rose flashes off suddenly.*)

STELLA. If you can't play bwidge, p'raps you can play shove-ha'penny ?

HANNAY. I have never even heard of the game.

STELLA. Can you play hop-scotch ?

HANNAY. Age, rheumatism, and inclination forbid.

STELLA. One of Rose's young gentlemen plays football. Can you play football ?

HANNAY. My dear, do I look like it ?

STELLA. Can you sit on the floor and kiss your big toe ?

HANNAY. It is a feat I have hitherto not attempted.

STELLA. Daddy says you are clever. You ain't, a bit. Can't you even play kiss-in-the-ring, pwofessor ?

HANNAY. My dear Stella, I am nearly sixty years old.

STELLA. Haven't you ever kissed any one ? Why, it's easy as easy.

HANNAY. I am sure I hear Doctor Paynter coming.

STELLA. P'raps I'd better teach you to play bwidge some other time. And p'raps we'd better pull the screen round the table. Daddy mightn't

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like to find that his estimable friend and colleague had been meddling wiv his writing-table.

HANNAY. Really, Stella, I have done nothing of the kind.

STELLA. You did, but I won't tell. (*They draw a screen round the table, and cross to the tea-table as Paynter enters.*)

PAYNTER. Tea all ready? That's right. The wind remains in the south, and has attained a velocity of twenty-three miles. (*Stella bursts out laughing.*) What's the matter, Stella?

STELLA. Mustn't say. Pwofessor, could you paint a picture of the moon?

HANNAY. No, Stella.

STELLA. I could. I would get some chalk and rub it on your face. Then I would hold a looking-glass before you, and you would see a picture of the moon.

PAYNTER. The child's rudeness is not intentional. She picks up these things in the nether regions, among the satellites. My housekeeper and servants are doing all they can to spoil her. (*To Stella*)—You had better go and have your tea with Mrs. King. I have business to discuss with the professor.

STELLA. I want to stop here.

PAYNTER. Go at once, Stella.

HANNAY. Good-bye, my dear.

STELLA. If you send me away, I'll eat all these chocolates as fast as I can, and make myself awful sick.

PAYNTER. Homeopathy, in this case, suggests confiscation. (*Takes the box.*)

STELLA. May I stay and have tea wiv you?

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PAYNTER. I have already said you may not.

STELLA. Pig! (*Snatches the box out of Paynter's hand and passes into outer atmosphere.*)

HANNAY. It is better to discover fixed stars than wandering comets.

(*Paynter moves his chair closer to Hannay, and glances furtively at him. Both make as though they would speak.*)

PAYNTER. I beg your pardon, Hannay.

HANNAY. I believe you were about to make a remark, Paynter.

PAYNTER. Yes—er, Stella cannot make a transit without causing a considerable derangement of the atmosphere.

HANNAY. Her phase at meridian is remarkably radiant.

PAYNTER. Will you take a cup of tea?

HANNAY. Thank you. Shall I help myself?

PAYNTER. Allow me.

HANNAY. This is a very comfortable room. Plenty of space and light.

PAYNTER. With peace at long intervals.

HANNAY. You find Stella sometimes—tempestuous?

PAYNTER. She is variable—like a planet.

HANNAY. Not a fixed body, like you and me.

PAYNTER. She is always in motion, rushing through space—like Hannay's Comet.

HANNAY. My dear Paynter, it is a pity we can never have a discussion without your dragging in my comet.

PAYNTER. Hannay, you are a very old friend, or I might have drawn your attention before this to

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the undoubted fact that whenever you come to visit me you talk of nothing but my star.

(*Both fidget. Paynter grabs at his watch.*)

HANNAY. I am keeping you from work?

PAYNTER. No, no—not at all. Confound my work. (*Rises.*) Hannay, I am a miserable failure.

HANNAY. I have heard you make a remark like that before.

PAYNTER. I have done nothing. It has been my ambition to make some scientific discovery, but I remain unsuccessful. Who has heard of Doctor Paynter outside this little University town? On the other hand, who has not heard of Professor Hannay? Among astronomers all over the world yours is a name to conjure with.

HANNAY. I have been fortunate.

PAYNTER. Your fortune has been phenomenal. You made a useful discovery in magnetism. You weighed an invisible star; you stumbled upon a new mineral; you dazzled us all with a new gas. Your startling paper upon the nebular hypothesis brought you a professorship at a very early age. Finally, you made your great discovery of the comet, which the entire world knows as Hannay's Comet. I made the identical discovery, but you were before me. Had you only failed that night, fame would have been mine. The comet, which, as I speak, is rushing through space millions of miles from our system, seeking another sun in the unknown depths of the heavens, would have borne my name. The scientific world of the future would have discussed the possible whereabouts of Paynter's Comet.

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HANNAY. I hoped you had got over that disappointment.

PAYNTER. I shall never get over it. I have been longing for that comet day and night. I would give anything that I possess to become the vested owner of that mass of nebulous vapour, which is recorded in the astronomical catalogue as Hannay's Comet. What consolation is wealth to an unsuccessful man who thirsts for fame?

HANNAY. Fortune, which has given you wealth, has decided you shall not have fame as well.

PAYNTER. Money can buy anything. Cannot it purchase fame? Hannay, my dear Hannay, I have known you for a great many years. We have been friends, I may say intimate friends, apart from those little rivalries which are inevitable to men of science. You will not be offended if I speak with most unusual frankness?

HANNAY. Say what you like. I shall not mind.

PAYNTER. You have mentioned in the course of conversation that you have no income apart from your professorship, and your commercial and literary royalties. You perceive I am speaking very plainly. I intend to speak more plainly still. I am about to suggest a bargain.

HANNAY. Well?

PAYNTER. Hannay, will you sell me the comet?

HANNAY. Sell my comet?

PAYNTER. You shall put your own price upon it. A sinful craving for that comet is spoiling my life.

HANNAY. Can a body of nebulous vapour, rushing through unknown space, be regarded as a marketable article? I am afraid it is not a thing

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for me to sell or for you to buy. Remember also, that the comet which bears my name proceeded out of the depths of space, passed round our sun, and departed from us for ever. Its orbit is in parabola, consequently it cannot return to our system.

PAYNTER. I know the comet has gone away for ever. That is no matter. If it bore my name, I should be given the credit of having discovered it throughout ages to come. My name would appear in the catalogue. I should obtain my share of fame. Remember how very little ahead of me you were in making the discovery.

HANNAY. I could hardly transfer my interest, even if I desired to do so.

PAYNTER. You could. You might send a letter to the press, stating you had ascertained in the course of conversation with me that I made the discovery of the comet before you. Really, you could afford to do it. You are so fortunate. You will probably discover another comet before you die, to say nothing of a few more asteroids and nebulæ.

HANNAY. A short-period comet, perhaps!

PAYNTER. Exactly. As brilliant as Donati's. Why not?

HANNAY. You are proposing a transaction which must be unique. You are asking me to sell a body of white-hot gas, which every hour of time is rushing from our system never to return, as one might dispose of an acre of terrestrial earth. Difficulties suggest themselves. I will not, however, admit they are insurmountable.

PAYNTER. Hannay! Does it become merely a question of—the figure?

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HANNAY. I will not go so far as to say I am unwilling to sell—to use your expression—but any consideration in money is out of the question. I have more than sufficient for my needs. I could not resign my claim to the comet for mere money. Is there anything you would care to offer me in exchange?

PAYNTER. Take anything that I have a right to call my own.

HANNAY. Each of us has discovered a celestial body. Mine has gone by for ever, back into the mystery of eternity; yours struck this earth and remains, and has succeeded in generating in the hearts of us both the heat of love.

PAYNTER. I do not follow you.

HANNAY. There are in Nature more sensations than we men of science are aware of.

PAYNTER. Undoubtedly. But what has this to do with the comet?

HANNAY. The meaning of that word?

PAYNTER. Long-haired.

HANNAY. Well?

PAYNTER. I remain in the dark.

HANNAY. I discovered the comet. You discovered a star.

PAYNTER. Don't tell me that you want Stella?

HANNAY. Now we approach a clearer atmosphere.

PAYNTER. It is impossible—absurd—wicked.

HANNAY. Have you answered?

PAYNTER. The comet! Paynter's Comet! Hannay, the child would plague your life out.

HANNAY. I will risk the plague.

PAYNTER. You want to adopt the child?

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HANNAY. I am an old, unmarried man, without relations. I should like to end my days surrounded with sunshine.

PAYNTER. Storms more likely. Stella is very tempestuous. She is deceitful and—and you cannot imagine how mischievous she is. When she grows up she is certain to elope with some scamp of a student, and give you no end of trouble. She would ruin your work, too. Listen to me, Hannay. Don't think about the child. I—I shouldn't like you to be burdened with her. Let me offer you something else—something more suitable, more valuable.

HANNAY. I am prepared to take Stella, and her only, storms and tempests included, and restore to you your peaceful sky.

PAYNTER. I must have the comet. Stella will only be living in a different house, should I desire to see her at any time. I could see her often, if I wanted to. Every day I could see her. It is not a long walk. Hannay, you won't beat her?

HANNAY. Do I look a monster?

PAYNTER. I don't know. I shouldn't like to think of Stella not being allowed to do just what she liked—subject, of course, to those limits I have myself assigned.

HANNAY. What do you say?

PAYNTER (*putting out his hand very unwillingly*). Anything for the comet.

HANNAY. It is settled?

PAYNTER. Your comet for my star. She shall shine on you to-morrow.

(*Stella enters the system.*)

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HANNAY. I will submit to you my letter for the press some time during the evening.

STELLA. Daddy, I touched one of the funny things you play wiv in the Observatory, and it went and bwoke itself.

PAYNTER. Now you know what you are in for.

HANNAY. Come with me, dear. I have something nice to tell you. (*He takes Stella's hand, and they pass together beneath the horizon.*)

PAYNTER. Success at last! The comet is mine. I have not swept the midnight skies in vain. My name shall also be written, and my memory will endure, in the great romance of space. (*Draws the screen aside and discovers his writing-table.*) So, so, Miss Stella! Here is another piece of wanton mischief, and your last. The star has fallen from this system; she has now set below my horizon, and gone away for ever like Hannay's—no, no, like Paynter's Comet. After to-day it may be possible for me to work.

(*Stella breaks through, obscured with rain-clouds. She runs up to Paynter, and flings her arms about him.*)

STELLA. I don't want a new daddy. I won't have a new daddy. I won't go to old Monkey-face. (*Pointing to the writing-table.*) Old Monkey-face did nearly all that. I won't go to him. I want to stay wiv you.

(*Darkness and storm, a dense fog, rain, and wind; all heavenly bodies, stars, comets, asteroids, nebulæ, and satellites, hopelessly obscured; no astronomical observation possible. Scene*

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otherwise the same; earth, without a sky, Paynter's study without a light. A stormy evening. Paynter crosses the edge of penumbra, lights a candle, sits beside the fire, seeking warmth and starlight.)

PAYNTER. I have done no work all day. I am run down, I fear. Usually I like to hear the cry of the wind and the sob of the rain. I like to hear the elements of nature struggling in the atmosphere outside, but this evening they are in the house, struggling here and inside me. They carry my old body about from room to room, as if searching for something it had lost. I have lost nothing; I have gained. I am about to join the distinguished army of astronomers who have made discoveries in the depths of space. I am, at last, a happy man. (*Picks up the poker, and traces lines among the ashes.*) Here we have Zenith Gardens. That piece of coal is this house. This piece of cinder a star, a dead and burnt-out planet, let us suppose, moving about it upon an ellipse. She—it, I mean—will complete a revolution of this house once in the course of the twenty-four hours. But let us suppose that the orbit of this planet be in hyperbola or in parabola (*he makes a wide sweep with the poker*), and the heavenly body to have passed the given point, such point being this house, she—I should say, it—will in such case never return. (*Walks to the window.*) I wonder what Hannay is doing. I suppose they—he, I mean—is on the high-road to fresh discoveries, which will add fame to his name. (*Draws aside the curtain.*) There is no star to-night,

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no star at all—no Stella. It is dark and cold and lonely in this world when there is no heavenly light. But the comet will be mine—Paynter's Comet. A thousand years from now it will be known as Paynter's Comet. And where is it now? Millions of miles away, rushing through a system which our finest instruments cannot discover, among stars the light of which will never reach this earth, passing perhaps within the ken of other worlds, containing silly old ambitious men like me and children as pretty and dainty—ah yes, and as mischievous as little Stella. Perhaps in one of those unknown worlds, some other astronomer will lay claim to having discovered that comet—my comet—and will quarrel with his colleagues over this thing of gas. And the comet, caring for none of us, will rush on in parabola, passing no body in space twice throughout all time, continuing its mysterious course which, like the mystery of human existence—and human ambition—knows no end. Are not these struggles of ours after all contemptible? Our world is such a very insignificant speck in that limitless path of the comet. We men of science are small crawling things which irritate its cuticle; and upon this little path of ours Love is the only light. (*He drops the curtain and turns away.*) How silent the house is! (*Opens the door and listens.*) Not a sound! Not a voice! Not a laugh! Nothing being broken! The child might be lying dead upstairs. (*Picks up a little shoe.*) Ah, light is coming.

(*The satellite Rose appears with a lighted lamp.*)

ROSE. Dinner is ready, sir.

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(*Paynter takes no notice, and Rose disappears.*)

PAYNTER. They would call this a little shoe. To me it is a part of the heavenly atmosphere. My little Star wore this. She would always leave her things lying about in the study. Sometimes she would throw them at me. She liked to be here with me. She was fond of me. She loved me. What a tiny thing! It is like a toy. It is a very pretty little shoe. A very pretty little foot wore it. The right foot. How it would stamp! How it would kick the panels of my door! (*Pushes it into his pocket.*) I wonder if she has broken anything of Hannay's yet. I hope she has. It must be very bright and cheerful in Hannay's house to-night. (*Takes out a large red handkerchief and dabs his eyes.*) This is fame. This is success; and this is solitude! I shall have the comet. The comet is mine. It had a beautiful nucleus.

(*The satellite Mrs. King passes into perigee.*)

MRS. KING. Dinner has been waiting a lo: g time, sir.

PAYNTER. Haven't I had dinner? It seems a very long time since tea. What makes you all so quiet to-night, Mrs. King? I like my house to be orderly, but I do not require you to move about as if we were waiting for the undertaker. Why are you so quiet downstairs? Why don't you laugh? Why can't you make a little noise?

MRS. KING. Why, sir, us ain't been any quieter than usual, sir. Perhaps, sir, it is because Miss Stella, dear heart, has gone away, sir. Her was always laughing about the house, sir.

PANYTER. Stuff and nonsense! I am going out,

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Mrs. King. I shall not dine at home. You can order the dinner to be taken down.

MRS. KING. Why, sir, 'tis a dreadful wet and windy night, it is, sir, sure enough.

PAYNTER. What do I care for wind and rain? Send up my boots. I will put them on here in the warm. Why, come nearer, Mrs. King! What's the matter with you? You have been crying. What have you been crying about?

MRS. KING. Well, sir, I thinks—us all thinks—at least, sir, it do seem so strange like without Miss Stella, sir.

PAYNTER. Stop that noise. When women sniff men long for Mount Athos. It is a very good thing the child has escaped from being spoilt by you. (*He starts and listens*). What was that? Did you hear that sound? Is there any one in the hall?

MRS. KING. It were just the wind, sir. It be a terrible howling contrairy kind of evening, sir.

PAYNTER. It was not the wind. It sounded to me as though—ah, there it is again! It sounds to me as if some one was trying to reach the knocker.

(*Mrs. King departs hurriedly.*)

PAYNTER. The boy with the evening paper. It is cruel to send children out on such a night.

(*The outer atmosphere becomes disturbed by electrical discharges of joyful cries and much laughter. Stella rises in a tumultuous fashion, wearing a man's hat and overcoat, her shoes muddy.*)

STELLA. Daddy! Oh, daddy!

PAYNTER. My darling! My star!

STELLA. I wunned away. I wunned all acwoss

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the town through the rain and the wind. You won't send me away again, will you, daddy? Dear old vewy ugly daddy!

(*Mrs. King returns to the system after the manner of an excited storm-cloud.*)

MRS. KING. Miss Stella must come and change her things at once, sir. Dear heart, her must be soaked through and through.

PAYNTER. I should think her was soaked—confound your pronouns, Mrs. King! My sweetheart, your hair is dripping, your beautiful hair (*kissing it*), more lovely than all the tails of all the comets. Stella, darling, you will have a dreadful cold.

(*The outer atmosphere becomes again deranged by a storm of knocking upon the front door and a wild ringing of the bell.*)

STELLA. Don't care. Don't care a bit. Don't care for nothing. Daddy, wasn't I awful bwave? If you send me back, I shall wun away again. Kiss me, daddy, and say I'm a vewy nice little girl, and say you are d'eadful glad.

(*Hannay follows the storm, attended by Rose.*)

HANNAY. Paynter, Stella has run away. Ah, thank Heaven! She is safe.

PAYNTER (*rising and holding Stella to him*). Hannay, here is my fame. Here is my success in this world. Keep your comet!

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FROGGIE WOULD A-WOOING GO!

A BOY was cleaning boots in a little stone-paved yard, and beside him an old man watched the operation keenly. Behind them stood a toy cottage, ludicrously like the Noah's Ark of childhood's days. Two toy trees stood in front; any one had to look twice before being convinced they were rooted in the soil, and were not resting upon circular wooden plates. Upon the side of the gorge toy cows were browsing, and a toy copse of stiff larches appeared farther down. A little stream descended from the moor, gurgled across the stone floor of the toy yard in front of the toy cottage, and bustled down the gorge to join the Taw River. This stream was the pride of the old man's heart, for it was his very own. It was the Bailey Brook, and the name of the gorge down which it flowed was Noah's Ark Corner.

Bailey was king of the gorge. He had been called the Central Criminal Court by an irreverent London visitor, who had heard every one refer to him as Old Bailey. Many years ago a certain shrewd individual annexed that Dartmoor gorge with its crystal stream. He built himself a tiny

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cottage, threw up a toy wall, planted the toy trees, and reclaimed a patch of moor. When he died his son succeeded to the property, and that was how the Duchy of Cornwall lost Noah's Ark Corner. The Baileys from being squatters became commoners, and enjoyed the great privileges which that title confers.

Old Bailey had cleaned his own boots for more than half a century before discovering that it was not a gentlemanly thing to do. A visitor had remarked in his hearing that one of the chief advantages of gentility was an immunity from boot-cleaning; this was after a day's tramp through Dartmoor bogs. After that day old Bailey never cleaned his boots. He hired a boy to do it for him. The old man's grandson had married the daughter of one of Bailey's numerous cousins, and the boot-cleaner was their son. The old man solved the problem of relationship by calling the boy Uncle; the boy called him Guv'nor.

One boot was finished, and the boy set it down on the stones, where it looked like a stranded coal-barge; it was certainly out of proportion with the cottage. Old Bailey advanced to inspect it, with his clasp knife in one hand and the greater part of a rose-tree in the other. He picked up the boot and turned it about, so that the sun might glint upon its polished surface. He knew by instinct that it is the duty of a critic to find faults rather than to praise.

"That be a thumb-mark," he grumbled.

"It b'ain't," retorted Uncle. "Any one that calls thikky a thumb-mark be a liar."

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"I say 'tis," said old Bailey sternly. "What be I, then?"

"Yew b'ain't a liar, Guv'nor, and thikky b'ain't a thumb-mark neither," said Uncle.

"If I says 'tis a thumb-mark it be, whether it be or b'ain't," said old Bailey. Then he breathed heavily upon the blemish and passed the boot across, remarking: "Brush mun agin; I b'ain't going a courting wi' dirty boots."

Uncle lowered his arms, and gazed at his elderly relative open-mouthed. "Going a courting?" he said.

"Soon as I gets in they boots," the old man replied. "Florry be going to London, and I b'ain't going to pay housekeeper while there be lone women."

Florry was the old man's granddaughter. She had kept house for him a good many years, and at last had come to the conclusion that she had bloomed unseen upon Dartmoor long enough. She was therefore about to leave the place where she was wanted, and go to a place where she was not, which is what most young people do.

"Yew ha' been married twice, Guv'nor," said Uncle admiringly.

"'Tis a duty to get married," replied old Bailey with a self-sacrificing air. "Heathman over to Lew, him wi' the fifteen maidens, was a telling me how there be two women and a bit for every man."

"Ain't 'e married two?" Uncle reminded him.

"I ain't had my bit," said old Bailey. "There be many who doan't tak' more than one; and

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there be some what doan't tak' none. Sam'l Parr to Tor Down ain't never been married; there be two lone women, and a bit. Jamie Dunn to Brynamoor ain't been married neither; there be two lone maidens and two bits."

"I know who 'tis," Uncle cried. "'Tis Sal Christmas."

Old Bailey told him to mind his own business. The boots were finished by this time, but the gay lover seemed in no hurry to put them on. He stood beside the Bailey Brook, cutting thorns off the rose-bush, until his granddaughter appeared with his hard hat and neck-cloth. She had been doing her best to renovate these articles.

"What be'st doing wi' roses, Guv'nor?" she called, when she perceived old Bailey's occupation.

"Guv'nor be going a courting," cried Uncle shrilly.

"Be ye?" cried Florry admiringly.

"Ah, I be," said old Bailey. "B'ain't ashamed of it, neither."

"Wish I was a man," sighed Florry. "'Tis nice to go courting when yew ha' a mind to. Let me pin two o' they roses in your coat, Guv'nor, and let Uncle brush ye; and do 'e let me get my scissors and trim they white whiskers nice and vitty."

"Let me bide, will ye?" said the old man crossly, as the two young people came about him. "When I wants a varlet, Uncle, I'll tell 'e. Keep they hands off me, Florry; I put on roses to go courting afore your mother wur born."

Shortly afterwards the lord of Noah's Ark Corner set forth, followed by the admiring gaze of his

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young relations. He was a fine-looking old gentleman, wonderfully upright, and his face shone with ardour and soap. No handsome young fellow of twenty could have sought out the lady of his heart with half the assurance displayed by this old rogue of seventy-two. He advanced towards the far end of the village, where three granite cottages stood in the centre of small wind-swept gardens. In one of these cottages dwelt Sal Christmas, who was about to be offered the honour of becoming Mrs. Bailey the Third.

The truth may as well be told. Mrs. Christmas was a wealthy widow, with no less than £80 a year. That was why old Bailey's heart was beating amorously. For those fourscore sovereigns, coming regularly year by year, he wore his yellow roses; for those delightful sovereigns he was for the third time a lover.

When Mrs. Christmas came to dwell in the little stone cottage Bailey had received her coldly; as a commoner he did not care for foreigners. Then rumour was spread that the widow had a little money invested, and straightway he experienced a new sensation. Later it became known that the sum invested was considerable, and the symptoms increased. Finally it was established that the good lady's wealth had not been exaggerated, and at the same time old Bailey realised that he was for the third time in his blameless career hopelessly enchained in the meshes of love. His devotion took a strange form. He collected eighty pebbles from the Bailey Brook, and set them out in parallel lines along his little stone yard, and gazed at them

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until Florry thought him quite demented; she did not know he was in love.

Mrs. Christmas was fat and fifty—at least she said she was fifty; she could not deny her obesity, because it was obvious. The shadow she cast was considerable, and it did not grow less. She had a trick of entering a room sideways, and most people said it was necessary; when she walked abroad her figure was unquestionably a feature upon the landscape. She was a kindly woman with a not unpleasing face, sober and respectable, but unfortunately not very thrifty. There was no trace of avarice in her character. Had that been known to old Bailey he might have hesitated before setting forth from his toy kingdom, with his roses, and smile, and dream of love.

The widow had a daughter to whom she was entirely devoted. Bessie was a learned young woman. She was selfish, but that was the fault of her mother, who gave way to her in everything. Bessie had been educated in Exeter, where she had become strongly attached to the academic life. It was her ambition to open a preparatory school for young ladies, and she was always begging her mother to advance money for that purpose; this the widow would have done willingly had her income been sufficient.

Mother and daughter were in the garden when the suitor made his appearance. Bessie saw him first, and the bunch of roses fastened to his coat gave her an inkling of the true state of affairs. She knew that when a man wears roses he must be courting, as surely as when a horse has its tail

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plaited with coloured ribbons it is for sale. So she called to her mother, "Here's Mr. Bailey coming to see you."

Mrs. Christmas shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked along the road. "He ain't coming here," she whispered cautiously; "he'm going to Lake."

"Who would he be courting there?" Bessie demanded.

"He ain't courting," said her mother. "The idea! And him past seventy."

"He is courting," Bessie insisted. "Look at his roses, and he is wearing his best clothes. Mother, you know he has walked home with you from chapel the last four Sundays."

With that Miss Bessie departed, not wanting to embarrass the couple by her presence. It was known that old Bailey was a saving soul, and it was rumoured that he was well off. Her preparatory school might emerge from the stage of dreamland and become an accomplished fact if her mother married the commoner. Bessie ran upstairs to watch the comedy from the corner of her bedroom window.

Bailey approached the fence and bowed to the widow in his best manner. Mrs. Christmas inclined her stout figure graciously, and made the usual opening remark concerning the state of the atmosphere. The commoner returned the customary answer, after which a period of bashfulness ensued. Then Bailey had a vision of eighty golden sovereigns, and plunged wildly into small talk.

"Did 'e hear they owls hooting to-night?" he asked.

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"I never heard 'em," said the widow; "I sleeps sound."

Another period of bashfulness intervened. Upstairs Bessie was shaking with laughter; such simplicity appeared very absurd to one of her advanced ideas.

"They wur hooting loud," Bailey went on.

"Was they?" said the widow. "What would they be hooting vor, Mr. Bailey?"

"Doan't 'e know?" asked Bailey.

"No, I dusn't," replied the widow.

"Nor me," remarked Bailey.

Here ended the first stage of the wooing. Bailey prided himself on his small talk, and considered that his remarks about the owls were decidedly luminous. The next thing was to persuade the widow to come for a walk. He suggested they should go to Collyford Bridge, which was known locally as Lovers' Meet; Mrs. Christmas smiled archly, and went indoors to put on her hat. While she was absent Bailey had another, and a nearer, vision of eighty golden sovereigns.

Presently they set out down the lane. They had to walk close together, as the lane was very narrow and the widow was wide; it never occurred to Bailey how entirely out of proportion she would be at Noah's Ark Corner. Mrs. Christmas was contemplating the changes she would make in the gorge when it became her property. Before reaching the bridge she had made up her mind to rebuild the Ark, and divert the Bailey Brook so that it should run round the yard instead of through it, with various other minor improvements. Bailey

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could afford the changes quite well. She was prepared to marry him; he was an influential commoner, and she was only a foreigner. By marrying him she would obtain a position in the neighbourhood unattainable otherwise; she would become the mistress of a considerable property; and above all she would be in a position to give Bessie that opening in life which the girl so ardently desired.

They came to Lovers' Meet, and Bailey made the same remarks he had made to the girl he had brought there half a century before. He observed there was not much water running; there would be more after the next rainfall; there would be still less if the rain kept off. The widow made very much the same answers as the girl who had become Mrs. Bailey the First, and the young woman who had become Mrs. Bailey the Second.

The old man began to grow nervous. He was perfectly prepared to court as he had done in times past, that is to say, to propose a trip to Tavistock Goose Fair, and in reply to a bashful protest suggest a wedding ceremony early in the morning, with a subsequent honeymoon upon the swings and roundabouts; but in this case some originality was demanded of him. It was necessary to discover how the widow's money was invested; he had to break new ground, so to speak. A brilliant idea occurred to him. He pointed with his stick to a clump of larches upon the rocky edge of the moor, and asked, "How many trees do 'e think be there?"

The widow considered, and suggested, "Two or three hundred likely."

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"There be eighty," said Bailey shamelessly, "and there be a circle of eighty gurt stoanes round 'em. It be curious how that number eighty comes up hereabouts. There be eighty hens down to the Ark, and I got a field eighty yards across, and us'll be eighty if us lives long enough," he concluded recklessly.

"It be curious," said Mrs. Christmas.

"Ah, 'tis," agreed Bailey. "If I wur to sell Noah's Ark Corner for what I ha' been offered vor it, I'd have eighty pounds a year."

"That be just what I've got," exclaimed the innocent widow.

Bailey was intensely interested by this piece of information. "That be more and more curious," he said. "I wouldn't sell," he went on sharply. "When money be invested you never feels safe. One year it comes; another it doan't."

"There be good investments, and there be bad," said the widow.

"All be bad," asserted Bailey with deep conviction.

"They b'ain't," denied the widow.

"Where be a good 'un?" asked Bailey bitterly.

"My money be in a good 'un," said the widow, falling into his trap. "My husband started a steam-laundry and turned it into a company, and I got shares in it."

"It might bust," said Bailey.

"So might the moon," the widow retorted, "but it doan't; it gets bigger every year."

Bailey inferred rightly that the increase was to be set to the business of the laundry, not to the

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circumference of the moon. His knowledge of laundries was contemptible; but he had heard enough to be convinced that the widow's income was as safe as could reasonably be expected, and he decided that he might launch out boldly into the progressive stage of courtship. All this time they had been standing on the bridge. Any one who has had experience in courtships will not require to be told that for some reason or other it is easier to propose when sitting down. There was a boulder covered with patches of black lichen hard by. Bailey proposed that they should seat themselves, and Mrs. Christmas did not object. While they were settling themselves the cunning old man contrived to drop one of his roses; he presented it to the lady, and she was graciously pleased to accept it. The old man perceived that his suit was prospering, and the eighty golden sovereigns loomed up as large almost as the widow herself.

"Florry be going to London soon," he announced, with great deliberation. "She says, 'Be going to better myself, Guv'nor.' I says, 'Take care yew don't worser yourself.' She says, 'Yew mun get a housekeeper," he concluded pathetically.

"There be women," said Mrs. Christmas encouragingly.

"If I gets a housekeeper I'll ha' to pay she," said Bailey keenly. "If I marries she I doan't ha' to pay."

"Be you thinking o' matrimony?" the lady asked pleasantly.

"Ah, I be," admitted Bailey.

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The widow, being able to think of no reply to this, remained silent. At length Bailey remarked impressively, "I be thinking on't."

"O' what?" asked the coy widow.

"O' matrimony," replied Bailey, making the word sound like matter o' money.

This brought them back to the same place as before. Silence came again, until the widow stirred her ample form and declared she must be going home to prepare the supper.

"Why doan't Bessie do it?" enquired Bailey.

"Bessie!" exclaimed the widow, with a laugh. "Her's no housewife! The girl can't cook a potato; her's at her books all day long; her's a clever maid."

Bailey had his own ideas about the education of the young, but did not venture to express them, because he knew how the widow doted upon her daughter. Perceiving that the fateful moment had arrived, he drew himself up, placed both hands on the knob of his stick, stared vacantly at the distant tors, and demanded: "What be yew a going to du second Wednesday in October?" He had asked that question on two previous occasions, and it had become with him tantamount to a proposal of marriage.

"Why, that be Goose Fair!" exclaimed Mrs. Christmas, little guessing that the two previous Mrs. Baileys had made the same remark in reply to Bailey's question.

"It be," said Bailey contentedly. It was all plain sailing then; he knew the part by heart. "Shall us go to Goose Fair?" he asked glibly.

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"Shall us throw at the cocoanuts and ride on the wooden horses?"

He forgot that a change had come over the scene. He was somewhat past throwing for cocoa-nuts, and Mrs. Christmas was not admirably adapted for riding upon the wooden horses.

"Go to Goose Fair wi' yew!" the widow exclaimed. "Whatever would the folk say?"

Bailey nodded his head approvingly; it was the right cue. "They would say us wur honeymooning," he replied, staring harder than ever at the distant tors.

Here the lady departed from tradition. The correct reply was a giggle, but being a widow, and therefore untrammelled by convention, she said somewhat sharply, "They'd call us two old vules likely."

Bailey paused. This new rendering of the part bewildered him, and he forgot his answer. He stared in deep thought, until the setting sun came into his eyes and made them water. Then it occurred to him he might repeat his last line. "They would say us wur honeymooning," he said again.

The widow opened her mouth to reply, but seeing the puzzled look on the old man's face, she laughed instead. It was not a giggle certainly, but it served the purpose of one.

"Us could tell 'em us wur," said Bailey promptly; "us could be married in the morning."

Bailey had played his part, and it now remained for the widow to play hers. The end of it was that they walked back up the lane arm-in-arm.

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When Bessie saw them from the window she knew it was time to play her part. After the suitor's departure she had an interview with her mother, the result of which was so satisfactory that she dreamed all night of a house in one of the side streets of Plymouth, with a brass plate upon the door setting forth the fact that there was the preparatory school for young ladies conducted by Miss Christmas.

The widow had dreams of Noah's Ark Corner under entirely new management. As for old Bailey, he had eighty intangible sovereigns dancing gaily upon his patchwork quilt all night.

He announced his engagement to his granddaughter laconically. "'Tis done," he said.

"It be?" cried Florry eagerly.

"Ah," said the grandfather.

In due course the portly bride-elect came to take stock of Noah's Ark Corner. Her presence ruined the gorge from an artistic standpoint; she was like a female Gulliver in a new Lilliput. Explaining to Bailey that, before marrying him, she should require certain alterations to be made, she gave instructions for a new kitchen to be built, for the windows to be enlarged, for the doors to be widened, for the roof to be tiled; she had never lived under thatch, and she was not going to. The old man agreed to everything, and sent for the builders at once; the expense would come out of his wife's pocket, not out of his. When they were married he could teach her economy; but he knew that to win her he must spend some of her money.

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On Sunday evening the engaged couple went to chapel. The widow had something on her mind; knowing that old Bailey was not free from avarice, she had determined that evening to put him to the test. When they had got rid of the neighbours after service, and were walking down the lane, she mentioned, in what she hoped was a careless voice, that in consideration of his comfortable position she had decided to make over her money to Bessie, in order that the young woman might open her school.

The old man was far too keen-witted a bird to peck at such chaff. He had never in his life heard of any one voluntarily resigning an income in favour of another; he knew perfectly well people never did such things. They might suffer for others, they might even shed their blood for others, but they would never give them their money. Bailey supposed such a case had never occurred in the whole history of the world. The widow's ruse was somewhat too palpable. Had she said she proposed giving Bessie a tenth part of her income she might have deceived him, although it was unlikely; but to say she intended giving the girl the entire amount was to place rather a low estimate upon his common sense. Indeed, it was in quite an offended tone that he replied: "The money be yours to give or to keep; it bain't mine."

"Yew doan't mind, then?" said the widow. "I thought yew wouldn't. Yew'm well off, wi' plenty vor the two of us."

"I bain't so well off as folks say," said Bailey hurriedly. "I knows what 'tis to be pinched vor a shillun."

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"Give over wi' they tales," said the widow archly.

"It be true," asserted the old man. "I be dreadful in debt; I owes six shilluns to Joe Wannell vor cutting turves; I had to ask mun vor time."

"If yew'm in debt I won't marry 'e," declared the widow.

"I'll pay mun," said Bailey hurriedly. "I'll send mun to 'e wi' receipt."

"We'd be in work'us 'fore Christmas if the truth wur being told," the widow went on. "Yew'll tak' me vor myself alone, won't 'e?"

"Ah," said Bailey.

"Then I'll marry 'e on Goose Fair day," the widow promised.

The second Wednesday in October arrived, the great day sacred to the goose, and old Bailey was duly sacrificed to his avarice, amid an odour of sage and onions. The ceremony took place in the early morning. No expense was spared, as the old man felt he could be liberal for once with his wife's money. Then they went off to Tavistock, but Bailey was greatly disappointed to find he was not such an adept at throwing for cocoa-nuts as on those days when he had celebrated his former honeymoons. Nor was this his last disappointment. One fine day a big bill came in from the builder, another from the carpenter, another from the painter, another from the glazier, and a few more from smaller fry. There was also a carriage to be paid for, and the ringers expected a dinner, and the neighbours demanded liquid refreshment ac-

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cording to custom. Bailey gasped at the prospect of parting with so much of his wife's money; but when the creditors became pressing he approached the good lady, who was still full of schemes for the improvement of Noah's Ark Corner, and was even then engaged in executing them with little regard for cost, and suggested that the time had come for him to administer her estate.

"What be yew talking about?" asked Mrs. Bailey, who was beginning already to rule the Ark with a firm hand. "Yew knows well enough how I made over my money to Bessie."

"Ah, yew did say so, but I knew yew wur joking," replied the old man lamely.

"But I have," the lady cried. "Bessie has got every penny. If you doan't believe me, yew can go and see the school she'm starting to Devonport."

"Wur yew telling me the truth?" gasped Bailey.

"Well, I b'ain't a liar," said Mrs. Bailey, who had quite determined that her husband should be cured of avarice.

"Then I be ruined! I be going into work'us this afternoon!" moaned the miserable old man.

Instead of that he had to pay his bills, and submit to a sermon from his wife upon the sin of covetousness, which was no doubt good for him; but those who ought to know say that old Bailey has become very peevish since the third and last time he went a-wooing.

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XI

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

TAVY river rises on Cranmere, flows down Tavy Cleave, divides the parish of Mary Tavy from that of Peter Tavy, passes Tavy Mount, and leaves Dartmoor at Tavystock, or Tavistock as it is now spelt. Each Dartmoor river confers its name, or a portion of it, upon certain features of its own district. The Okements meet at Okehampton, and one of them has Oke Tor, which has been corrupted into Ock and even Hock. Even the tiny Lyd has its Lydford. Each river has also its particular characteristic. The East Okement is the river of ferns, the Teign the river of woods, the Taw the river of noise, the Dart the river of silence, and the Tavy is the river of rocks. Tavy Cleave, from the top of Ger Tor, presents a grand and solemn spectacle of rock masses piled one upon the other; it is a valley of rocks, relieved only by the foaming little river.

Mary Tavy is a straggling village of unredeemed ugliness, wild and bare. It lies exposed on the side of the moor and is swept by every wind, for not a bush or even a bramble will be found upon the rounded hills adjoining. Once the place was a mining centre of some importance. The black moor

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has been torn into pits and covered with mounds by the tin-streamers in early days, and more recently by the copper-miners. All around Mary Tavy appear the dismal ruins of these mines, or wheals as they are called. Peter Tavy, across the river, is not so dreary, but is equally exposed. This region during the winter is one of the most inhospitable spots to be found in England.

In Peter Tavy there lived, until quite recently, an elderly man, who might have posed as the most incompetent creature in the West Country. It is hardly necessary to say he did not do so; on the contrary, he posed as a many-sided genius. He occupied a hideous little tin house, which would have been condemned at a glance in those parts of the country where building by-laws are in existence. At one time and another he had borrowed the dregs of paint-pots, and had endeavoured to decorate the exterior. As a result, one portion was black, another white, and another blue. Over the door a board appeared setting forth the accomplishments of Peter Tavy, as he may here be called. According to his own showing he was a clock-maker; he was a photographer; he was a Dartmoor guide; he was a dealer in antiquities; he was a Reeve attached to the Manor of Lydford; and he was a purveyor of manure. This board was in its way a masterpiece of fiction. Once upon a time a resident, anxious to put Peter's powers to the test, sent him an old kitchen-clock to repair. He examined it, and gave it as his opinion that the undertaking would require time. When a year had passed the owner of the clock requested Peter to report pro-

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gress. He replied that the work was getting on, but "'Twas a slow business and 'twould take another six months to make a job of it." At the end of that period the clock was removed, almost by force, and it was then discovered that Peter had sold most of the interior mechanism to a singularly innocent tourist as Druidical remains unearthed by him in one of the shafts of Wheal Betsy.

As a photographer he carried his impudence still further. Some one had given him an old camera and a few plates. He began at once to inveigle visitors—chiefly elderly ladies, "half-dafty maidens" he impolitely called them—down Tavy Cleave, where he would pose them on rocks and pretend to photograph them with plates which had already been exposed more than once. "If I doan't get a picture first time, I goes on till I du," he explained. Once, when Peter announced "'twas a fine picture this time," a gentleman of the party reminded him he had omitted to remove the cap from the lens. Peter was not to be caught that way: "I took 'en," he said, "I took 'en, but yew warn't looking."

As a guide upon the moor Peter was an equal failure. He ought to have known Dartmoor after living upon it all his life; the truth was, he would have lost his way up on the road to Tavistock had he strayed from it a moment. Visitors, lured by the notice-board, had approached him from time to time with the request to be guided to Cranmere. Peter would take them along Tavy Cleave for a mile, then assure them a storm was coming up and it would be necessary to seek shelter as soon

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as possible, hurry them back, and demand half-a-guinea in return for his services. Peter had never been to Cranmere Pool, and had no idea how to get there. Sometimes a party would insist upon proceeding, in spite of the guide's warning, and in such cases the bewildered Peter would have to be shown the way home by his victims. He would demand the half-guinea all the same.

As a dealer in antiquities nothing came amiss. Broken pipes, bits of crockery, old mining-tools, any rubbish rotting or rusting upon the peat was gathered and classified as Druidical remains. No one knew where Peter had picked up the word Druidical; but it was certain he picked up their supposed remains on the piece of black moor which surrounded his house. Sometimes, it was said, he found a tourist foolish enough to purchase a selection of this rubbish.

What he meant by describing himself as an official receiving pay from the Duchy of Cornwall nobody ever knew. As a Reeve (another word he had picked up somewhere) of the Manor of Lydford he believed himself to be intimately connected with the lord of that manor, who is the Prince of Wales. He knew that august personage was interested somehow in three feathers. The public-house in the neighbourhood called THE PLUME OF FEATHERS had something to do with it he was sure, though he had never seen "goosey's feathers same as they on the sign-board." Once he thought seriously of erecting three feathers above his own door, and for that purpose captured a neighbour's goose and plucked three large quills from one of its wings,

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accompanying his action with the bland request, "Now bide still, goosey-gander, do' ye." He could not make his three goose-quills graceful and drooping, like those upon the signboard, and that was probably why Peter refrained from doing the Lord of Dartmoor the compliment of assuming his crest.

The village of Peter Tavy, like most spots upon Dartmoor, has its summer visitors; and these were sure, sooner or later, to make the acquaintance of Peter Tavy the man. They thought him a harmless idiot, and he reciprocated. One summer a journalist came upon the moor for his health and, desiring to combine business with pleasure, he wrote a descriptive sketch of Peter, and this was published in due course in a paper which by a curious accident reached Peter himself. The man was furious. He went about the two villages with the paper in his hand, his scanty hair bristling, his watery eyes bulging, his mouth twisted into a very ugly shape. It was a good thing the journalist had departed, for just then Peter was angry and vindictive enough for anything. Presently he met his clergyman; he made towards him, held out the paper, and, regardless of grammar, cried out, "That's me."

"He does not mention you by name," said the clergyman.

"He says the man in the iron house wi' notice-board atop. He's got down the notice-board as 'tis," spluttered Peter. "He says a ginger-headed man—that's me; face like a rabbit—well, that's me."

It was as a purveyor of manure that Peter found his level, if not a living. Probably he received

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financial assistance from his sister, who lived across the river at Mary Tavy. She had been formerly a lady's maid in Torquay; after more than thirty years' service her mistress had died, and had bequeathed to her a modest income, and on this she lived comfortably in retirement, crossing Tavy Cleave occasionally to visit her eccentric brother. She, too, was said to be eccentric, but that was only because she was fond of getting full value for a halfpenny. Mary Tavy was a spinster, and Peter Tavy was a bachelor. On those occasions when some ne'er-do-well attempted to annex Mary and her income, the good woman's eccentricity had revealed itself very strongly; and as for Peter, his own sister would remark, "Women never could abide he."

The Tavies always passed Christmas together. One year Peter would go across and stop with Mary for three days; the next, Mary would come across and stop with Peter for three days. Their rule on this matter was fixed; the visit never extended beyond three days, and Peter would not have dreamed of going across to Mary if it were the turn of Mary to come across to him.

Peter had a little cart and a pony to draw it. How he came by the pony nobody knew, but as it was never identified no hard questions were asked. Every year a few Dartmoor ponies are missed when the drift takes place; and at the same time certain individuals take to owning shaggy little steeds which have no past history. When a brand has been skilfully removed, one Dartmoor pony is very much like a score of others. To drive Peter

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into a corner over his title to the pony which pulled his shameful little cart—it was hardly better than a packing-case on wheels—would have been impossible. He had hinted that it was a present from the Prince of Wales as a slight return for services faithfully rendered; and as no one else in the Tavy district was in the habit of communicating with the lord of the manor, his statement could not easily be refuted.

With this pony and unlicensed cart Peter would convey people from time to time to the station at Mary Tavy, making a charge of eighteenpence, which was not exorbitant considering the dangers and difficulties of the road. For conveying his sister from her home to his at Christmas he made a charge of one shilling; when she expostulated, as she always did, and quoted the proverb "Charity begins at home," Peter invariably replied with another proverb, "Business is business."

Few will have forgotten the winter of 1881, when snow fell for over a week, and every road was lost and every cleave choked. Snow was lurking in sheltered nooks upon the tops of Ger Tor and the High Willhays range as late as the following May. Snow upon Dartmoor does not always mean snow elsewhere. It is possible sometimes to stand knee-deep upon the high moor and look down upon a stretch of country without a flake upon it, and so on to the sugared and frosted hills of Exmoor; but no part of the country escaped the great fall of 1881. Every one on the moor can tell of some incident in connection with that Christmas. At the two Tavies they tell how Peter tried to drive

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Mary from his village to hers, how he failed in the attempt, and how both of them remained good business people to the end.

It was Mary's turn to visit Peter that year, and she arrived upon Christmas Eve, quaintly but warmly dressed, a small boy carrying her basket, which contained the articles that she deemed necessary for her visit, together with a bottle of spiced wine, some cream cakes, and a plum-pudding as big as her head. The boy said a good many uncomplimentary things about that pudding as they climbed up from the Tavy, comparing it to the Giant's Pebble higher up the cleave. When Mary raised her black-mittened hand and threatened him with chastisement, the urchin lifted out the pudding in its cloth, set it at her feet, and told her to carry it herself, as it was "enough to pinch a strong man dragging thikky gurt thing up the cleave"; so Mary had to finish the journey hugging the pudding like a baby. She was walking to save herself sixpence. Peter had offered to come for her with his pony and cart, the charge to be one shilling, payable as follows—sixpence when she got into the cart and sixpence when she got out; but she had told him that she could get a boy to carry her basket for half that amount; when he protested she reminded him that business was business.

A light sprinkle of snow had fallen, just enough to dust over the rocks and furze-bushes; but it was very cold, the clouds were low and wool-like, and there was in the air that feel of snow which animals can nearly always detect, and men who live on the moors can sometimes.

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Peter and Mary spent the evening in simple style. Peter sat on one side of the fire, Mary on the other; sometimes Peter stirred to get fresh turves for the fire; sometimes Mary got up to heap the little table with good cheer and place it midway between the old-fashioned chairs. They both smoked, they both took snuff, they both drank spiced wine. Towards evening they talked of old times and became merry. Then they talked of old people and grew sentimental, dropping tears into their hot wine. Peter got up and kissed Mary, but Mary did not care for Peter's caresses and told him so, whereupon Peter advised her to "get along home then." Mary declared she would, but changed her mind when she thought of the gloomy cleave and the Tavy in winter flood; so they went on smoking, taking snuff, and drinking spiced wine.

The next day was fine, and Peter and Mary went to chapel. Mary gave her brother a penny to put into the plate, but he put it into his pocket instead; he was always a man of business. She also gave him a bright new florin as a Christmas present. He had made her understand, when the coin was safe in his possession, that he should still demand a shilling for driving her home, and over that point they wrangled for some time. In the evening, when Peter had fallen asleep over the fire, Mary repented of her kindness and sought to regain the florin; but Peter had it hidden away safely in his boot.

When the time came for Mary to start homewards it was snowing fast, and she did not like the prospect. Although it was not much after three o'clock,

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the outlook was exceedingly dark; there was an unpleasant silence upon the moor, and the snow-flakes were larger and falling thickly. But the pony was harnessed to the unsteady conveyance, and Peter was waiting; before Mary could utter a word of protest, he had bundled her in and they were off.

"'Twould have paid me better to bide home," said Mary.

"Do'ye sit quiet," Peter growled. Then he added, "Where's the shillun?"

"There now, doan't' ye worry about the shillun," said Mary; "I'll give it ye when I'm safe and sound to home wi' no bones broke."

"Shillun be poor pay vor driving this weather," said her avaricious brother.

Now and again a light appeared from one of the cottages. The pony struggled on with its head down, while the silence seemed to grow more unearthly, and the darkness increased, and the snow became a solid descending mass. The road between the two Tavies is not easy in winter under favourable conditions, and on that night it was to become practically impassable. When the last light of Peter Tavy the village had vanished, Peter Tavy the man had about as much idea where he was as if he had just dropped out of the moon.

"Where be'st going?" shrieked Mary, as the cart swerved violently to the right.

"Taking a short cut," explained Peter.

"Dear life!" gasped Mary, "he'm pixy-led."

"I b'ain't," said Peter; "I be driving straight vor Mary Tavy."

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Had he said straight for the edge of Tavy Cleave he would have spoken the truth. The pony knew perfectly well that they were off the road, and the sensible beast would have returned to the right way had it not been for Peter, who kept pulling its head round towards the cleave. Left to itself the pony would have returned to Peter Tavy, having quite enough sense to know that it was impossible to reach the sister village on such a night. Its master, with his fatal knack of blundering, tugged at the reins with one hand and plied his whip with the other. The snow was like a wall on every side; the clouds seemed to be dissolving upon them; suddenly the silence was broken by the roaring of the Tavy below.

"Us be going to kingdom come," shrieked Mary.

"Us b'ain't," said Peter; "us be going to Mary Tavy."

The pony stopped. Peter used his whip, and the next instant the snow appeared to rush towards them, open, and swallow them up. They had struck a boulder and gone over the cleave. The body of the cart was in one spot, its wheels were in another; and wallowing in that sea of snow were Peter and Mary and the pony. The animal was the first to regain its feet, and made off at once, with the broken harness trailing behind. Mary was the next to rise, plastered over with snow from head to foot; but she was soon down again, because her legs refused to support her. Presently she heard her brother's voice. He was invisible, because he had been thrown several feet lower, and had landed among rocks somewhat bruised and

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sprained; had it not been for the soft snow he would probably have been killed.

"I be broke to bits," he wailed.

"So be I," cried Mary; "So be the cart."

"Be the cart broke?" said Peter; and when Mary had replied it was only fit for firewood (it had not been fit for much else before the accident), he went on, "'Twill cost ye a lot o' money to buy me a new one."

"Buy ye a new one? The man be dafty!" screamed Mary.

"'Twas taking yew home what broke it," Peter explained.

"Call this taking me home?" Mary shouted.

"I done my best," said Peter; "'twas your weight what sent it over. There'll be the cart, and the harness, and doctor's bill; 'twill cost ye a heap o' money."

"Dear life, hear the man talk!" said Mary, appealing to the snow which was piled upon her ample form.

"Maybe there'll be funeral expenses," said Peter lugubriously; "I be hurt dreadful."

"Yew wun't want the cart then," his sister muttered; "and I'll have the pony."

"Where be the pony?" Peter demanded.

"Gone home likely; got more sense than we," said Mary. "Why doan't ye get up, Peter?"

"Get up wi' my two legs broke!" Peter replied in disgust.

"Dear life, man, get up!" Mary went on, with real alarm. "If us doan't get up soon us'll be stone dead carpses when us gets home."

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"I'll try, Mary, I'll try," said Peter.

"Come up here, Peter; there be a lew spot over agin them rocks," said Mary.

"There be a lew spot down here," Peter answered; "'tis easier vor yew to roll down than vor me to climb up."

When that question had been argued, Mary went down; that is to say, she groped and grovelled through the snow, half-rolling, half-sliding, until she reached the sheltered spot to which Peter had dragged himself. It was a small cleft, a chimney, mountaineers would have called it, in the centre of a rock-mass which made a small tor on the side of the cleave. Normally, this chimney acted as a drain for the rock-basin above, but it was then frozen up and dry. Peter was right at the back, huddled up as he could never have been had any bones been broken. When Mary appeared he dragged her in; she was almost too stout to pass inside, but as he placed her she made an excellent protection for him against the storm. Mary realised this, and suggested they should change places; but Peter pointed out that in his shattered condition any movement might easily prove fatal.

Presently Mary began to cry, realising the gravity of their position. The snow was descending more thickly than ever, drifting up the side of the cleave and choking the entrance to their cleft. Fortunately the night was not very cold, and they were both warmly clad, while the snow which was threatening to bury them was itself a protection. Help could not possibly reach them while the night lasted; no one would know what had befallen

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them, and they were unable to walk. When Mary began to cry Peter abused her, until his thoughts began also to trouble him.

"Think they'll put what's on my notice-board on my tombstone?" he enquired.

"Now doan't ye talk about tombstoanes, doan't ye now," implored Mary tearfully.

"Business is business," said Peter. "I told 'em to give me a gurt big tombstone, and to put upon him, *Peter Tavy, Clock-maker, Photographer, Dealer in Antiquities, Dartmoor Guide, Reeve of the Manor of Lydford, Purveyor of Manure, and et cetera.*"

"Doan't ye worry about it; they'll put it all down," said Mary.

"Us'll be buried together, same afternoon, half-past two likely," Peter went on.

"Doan't ye talk about funerals and tombstoanes," Mary implored. "Talk about spicy wine, and goosey fair, and them wooden horses what go round and round, and hurdy-gurdy music; talk about they, Peter."

"It ain't the time," said Peter bitterly.

A long dreary period of silence followed. Peter Tavy the village and Mary Tavy its sister were completely snowed up; and in the cleave of the river which divided the parishes Peter Tavy the man was snowed up with Mary Tavy his sister. They were miserably cold and drowsy. The snow was piled up in front of the chimney like a wall; there was hardly room for Mary to move, and Peter kept on groaning. At length he roused himself to remark: "Yew owes me a shillun."

"What would I owe ye a shillun vor?" said

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Mary sharply, wide-awake immediately at any suggestion of parting with money.

"Vor the drive," said Peter.

"I was to give ye a shillin vor taking me home, not vor breaking me bones and leaving me to perish in Tavy Cleave," said Mary. "Yew ain't earned the shillun, and I doan't see how yew'm going to."

"Yew owes me a shillun," repeated her brother doggedly. "I done my best to tak' ye home, and there was naught in your agreement wi' me about accidents. I never contracted to tak' ye home neither."

"Yew never promised to starve me wi' ice and snow on Tavy Cleave neither," replied Mary.

"I didn't promise nothing. I meant to tak' ye home, reasonable wear and tear excepted; this here is reasonable wear and tear. Yew promised to give me a shillun."

"When yew put me down," added Mary.

"Yew wur put down," said Peter.

"Not to my door."

"That warn't my fault," said Peter. "'Twas your worriting what done it; if yew hadn't worrited I'd have put ye out to Mary Tavy. Yew worrited and upset the cart, and now we'm dying."

"I b'ain't dying," said Mary stoutly.

"I be," said Peter drearily. "I be all cold and nohow inside. I be a going to die; I'd like to die wi' that shillun in my pocket."

"Doan't ye go on about it, Peter. If yew'm dying yew'll soon be in a place where yew wun't want shilluns."

"While I be here I want 'en," said Peter.

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"Yew'll be fearful sorry when yew see me lying a cold carpse wi'out a shillun in my pocket."

"Give over, can't ye," cried Mary. "You'll be giving me the creepies. If yew wur to turn carpsy I wouldn't bide wi' ye."

There was no reply. Silence fell again, and the only sound was the moaning of the wind and the roaring of the Tavy; the snow went on falling and drifting. Another hour passed, and then Mary shook off her drowsiness, and called timidly, "Peter." There was no answer; she could see nothing; her fear returned and she shuddered. "Peter," she called again; there was still no reply. Mary pressed her stout figure forward and reached out fearfully; she heard a groan. "Ah, doan't ye die," she implored; "wait till us gets out o' this. What's the matter, Peter?"

"Yew owes me a shillun," whispered a voice.

"I doan't owe it, Peter, I doan't," cried Mary pitifully. "If yew had drove me across the Tavy I'd have paid ye, I would; but us be still in the parish of Peter Tavy——"

She was interrupted by another and a deeper groan. "Be yew that bad?" she asked earnestly.

"I be like an old clock past mending," Peter answered, "like old George Routleigh in Lydford churchyard. My mainspring be broke; I be about to depart this life, December the twenty-seventh, eighteen hundred and eighty-one, aged fifty-eight, in hopes of being thoroughly cleaned and repaired and set a going in the world to come."

"Can I du anything vor ye, Peter?" asked Mary gently.

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"Yew can give me the shillun yew owes me," replied Peter.

"'Tis hard of ye to want a shillun if yew'm dying."

"Business is business," Peter moaned.

Fumbling in the little black bag she carried beneath her skirt, Mary produced a coin and held it out, saying sadly: "Here 'tis, Peter; I doan't want to give it ye, but if 'twill make yew die happy, I must."

With singular agility Peter reached out his hand, and after groping a little in the darkness secured the precious coin. He felt it, he bit it, and he asked with suspicion: "How be I to know 'tis a shillun? He tastes like a halfpenny."

"I know 'tis a shillun; I ain't got no halfpence," Mary answered.

Peter's groans ceased from that moment; he pocketed the coin and chuckled.

"I be a lot better," he said; "my legs b'ain't quite broke, I reckon, and I ain't so cold inside, neither."

Mary's reply was too eccentric to mention.

So soon as it was day a party of villagers set out from Peter Tavy well supplied with blankets and stimulants; Peter and Mary were not the only ones missing that fateful morning. The pony had returned to its stable the evening before, and had been seen by the local constable trailing its broken harness past the beer-house. An attempt had been made to find the couple then, but their tracks were completely hidden. Snow was still descending as the relief party waded through the drifts upon the edge of the cleave. The moor had disappeared

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during the night, and a strange region of white mountains had risen in its stead. The searchers worked their way on, with a hopeless feeling that they were only wasting their time, when they thought they heard a whistle. They stopped and argued the matter like the three jolly huntsmen; one said it was a man, another said it was a bird, and another it was the wind. They were all wrong; it was a woman. Out of the centre of a huge white mass down the cleave appeared a black scarf tied to the end of an umbrella.

Peter and Mary were rescued, not without difficulty, because the snow was four feet in depth on the side of the cleave, and were conveyed in due course to their respective villages. Being a hardy couple they were little the worse for their adventure, although Peter posed as an invalid to the end of his days, and sought parish relief in consequence; that was simply a matter of business.

So soon as the roads were passable and he was able to walk, Peter tramped across to Mary Tavy, to pay his sister a friendly, and a business, visit. "There be ten shilluns yew owes vor breaking my cart and harness," he explained. "When be yew a going to pay?"

"Never," replied Mary decidedly.

"Then I'll tak' ye into court," said Peter.

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XII

THE CHRISTENING OF THE FIFTEEN PRINCESSES

A MODERN FAIRY TALE

ONCE upon a time there was a village called Lew, and it was perched on the top of a hill 999 feet 11 in. high. That is the way fairy-tales have to begin; they insist upon going back into the remote past; but unfortunately the village of Lew has come down to our own days, and so has the big hill on which it stands. If we start over again with, "Once upon a time there was a man of Lew who had fifteen daughters," we are confronted by exactly the same difficulty; for the man is still alive, and the fifteen daughters look as if they never would, nor could, belong to the period when little pixy maids were to be seen any night running round and round the furze-bushes. The only way out of the difficulty is to be courageous, to tell the truth, and say: At the top of a hill 999 ft. 11 in. high—some say it is 1000 ft., but that is not true—stands the village of Lew, where a man named Heathman lives, who has fifteen daughters and not a single son; and the daughters are all princesses,

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although it is not easy to say why; but as they are pretty, and this is a fairy-tale, they must be.

The little village lies within a kind of ring-fence of ash and sycamores, which shelter the cob houses from the furious gales which boom and bluster over the Dartmoor tors. The wind is always sighing and moaning. It is cool upon the hottest day in August, and probably that is why Lew imports weak-chested people in some quantity. A regular business is done with big, smoky Bristol. Lew says to Bristol in its own language, "Us ha' butiful air up over in Demshur, and us ha' a proper plenty o' cream and butter and suchlike, but us ain't got much golden money. If yew sends us sickly volk, they can buy our cream and butter, and us will send 'em back strong." Bristol sees the force of this argument, and packs up and sends off its weak-chested folk, who reason, quite sensibly, "What's the use of being ill when we can go to the top of Lew hill and get well?" There is a tariff, of course, for Lew does not believe in free imports. The weak-chested folk must buy cream and butter and such-like in vast quantities, or they would be promptly deported under the local Aliens Act. As a matter of fact, they buy Lew produce without any grumbling; they do even more than they are wanted to, and are actually spoiling Lew—where tips are unknown and a man will do an extraordinary lot of work for two shillings—by raising the prices. They get absurdly grateful, these visitors, who enter Lew weak and thin, and are exported brown and fat and sleek, like porpoises.

It is the importation of so much foreign raw

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material that has built up the fortunes of the fairy family called Heathman. His Majesty, the father—hereinafter called King Heathman—was village cobbler before he came to the throne. After his accession he procured a horse and cart, and conveyed people to and from the distant station. He also annexed several acres of grass territory, by a process of peaceful penetration, and went in for cows and dairy produce. These two businesses developed so wonderfully that he dropped the cobbling, at which it must be owned he was always rather a poor hand. The weak-chested imports have to be brought up from the station ill, and taken back well; and while they are on the top of Lew hill they pass the time consuming cream, butter, milk, and eggs, which are provided by King Heathman, and delivered morning and evening by the golden-haired princesses. Their Majesties of the Palace—two cottages of red cob knocked into one—are busy people, and have no time for boasting; nor do they appear to think they have done anything out of the way in bringing up fifteen model princesses, not one of whom has ever given her parents an hour's anxiety. Sickness, some one will suggest; but that is a ridiculous idea, for the residents of Lew are never ill, and they live just as long as they like. Mrs. Heathman—hereinafter called Queen Heathman—looks the picture of health and strength, and only last Revel Week was footing it merrily after a long day's work, and dancing one or two anæmic young maids from foreign lands like Plymouth to a standstill. Old Grandfather Heathman, His Majesty's father, who is so much

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addicted to Lew that he won't die, had the impertinence to be dancing too. He must be nearly a hundred, though he neither knows nor cares about his age, and will merely state in the course of conversation that he intends to live out the present century, because he is so fond of the place. Old Grandfather Heathman is probably the only man now living in England who has witnessed a fatal duel, which was fought some time in the dark ages between the son of the then rector of Lew and a young doctor, a lady being of course the cause. The unfortunate young doctor, who very likely had never handled a sword before, was quickly killed by his opponent, who was an army officer. A stone still marks the spot, but it has become so overgrown with brambles that only Grandfather Heathman knows where to look for it.

The crown princess is only just twenty-three. The girls are nicely dressed, well educated, and speak and behave like little angels. If Romney were alive, he would want to paint them all. They are so pretty, these fifteen princesses of Lew. Each has a slender figure, wild-rose complexion, shy eyes, and fair hair. But it must not be imagined they are dancing princesses. One plays the American organ (which was alluded to with less respect as the harmonium twenty years ago) in the church; another is pupil-teacher; another manages the Sunday-school. They milk the cows and attend to the dairy work. All of them love animals; each has her dog, or cat, or bird, generally with her in work or in play. When you meet a pretty, well-dressed girl in Lew, you will not—unless you are

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the latest importation—ask her name. You will say, "And what is your number?" She will blush delightfully, lower her shy eyes, put her hands behind her back, and tell you.

When the first child was born the neighbours offered their congratulations, and said, "Of course you will call her Annie." In this part of the country it is absolutely necessary to have a girl in the family of that name, and it is most unorthodox to call the first girl anything else. But King Heathman rebelled against custom. He did not care for the name of Annie. He liked something daintier, something more unusual and fanciful. No doubt there is a vein of poetry somewhere in His Majesty's system. King Heathman stated plainly he would not have his daughter named Annie. He would go to the rector and ask him to supply a name. The good people of Lew were horrified at such heresy. They pointed out what a great risk he was running. It was quite possible he would not have another daughter, and thus his family would be branded with the disgrace of having no Annie. But King Heathman hardened his heart yet more, and tramped off to the rectory.

The rector of Lew is a scholar of the old type, an unconscious pedant who can hardly open his lips without quoting Latin or Greek, a type which before another twenty years have gone will be as extinct as the pixies. The rector of Lew is almost as much a curiosity of the past as Grandfather Heathman, only when people plant themselves on the top of the big hill 999 ft. 11 in. high, it never seems to occur to them that they are mortal. The

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rector solved the royal difficulty at once, and in the most natural way possible. "She is the first child. Let us call her either Prima or Una," he said. "Una is a pretty name."

"That 'tis, sir—that 'tis." For reasons of his own King Heathman always prefers to use the dialect of his country.

"You will find the name in the *Faerie Queene* written by Spenser," the rector continued.

"Old John Spencer over to Treedown?" suggested His Majesty, who had not dabbled much in classics.

"No; Edmund Spenser, who lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth."

"Aw, ees, sir, I knows 'en," said King Heathman.

Of course he didn't, but perhaps he was referring to the queen. Every one in Lew knows Queen Elizabeth intimately, because there is a little old house in the village where she was fond of putting up for the night occasionally. This house is still furnished very much as it was in the sixteenth century, but whether the Maiden Lady ever saw or heard of Lew is another matter. It is certain, however, that Queen Elizabeth occupied most of her long reign travelling about the country in order that she might sleep in out-of-the-way manor-houses. Whenever you visit any old house in this neighbourhood it is only polite to say, "Queen Elizabeth slept here, of course?" And then you will be shown the room and the bed, and if you go on being polite you may very possibly see the sheets and blankets and pillow-slips also, with the pillow itself still marked with the impression of Queen Elizabeth's head.

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Princess Heathman was duly christened Una, to the delight of her father, and the horror of the inhabitants. Every one breathed a sigh of relief when a second princess favoured Lew with her appearance. After all, the Heathmans would not be disgraced. There would be an Annie in the family, though they hardly deserved it after letting the first chance slip. King Heathman remained as silent as the Sphinx, and about as mysterious. When the time came for the royal christening, the church was filled. The rector received a particularly plump bundle from Queen Heathman, and placed it snugly into the hollow of his arm. He dipped his hand into the font, and the whisper of "Annie" went about the church. The next moment they heard, "Secunda, I baptise thee. . ."

The next year Princess Tertia was christened, and then Princess Quarta. Even the rector admitted Quarta was rather an unusual name, but His Majesty revelled in it, and would hear of nothing else. Every one said Q was such an awkward initial; and they had to make the same remark next year when Princess Quinta was brought to the font. "Sounds like squint," said one of the grumblers; but not one would venture to suggest such a thing now. By this time the gossips of Lew had pretty well accommodated themselves to the idea that King Heathman was irreclaimable. Annie, Bessie, and Lucy were the orthodox village names for young ladies; and it was perfectly clear he would have none of them.

In quick succession princesses were hurried to the font, and the unromantic ears of the congrega-

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tion were astonished by a list of beautiful names—Sexta, Septima, Octava, Nona of the wonderful eyes, and Decima of the sunny hair. But when the eleventh princess was brought to church a serious difficulty arose. A perfect understanding existed between His Majesty and the court chaplain. The father had no idea what the name of his new daughter was to be when she was handed into the scholar's arms. The rector did not use the formula, "Name this child," but substituted the question, "What is her number?" or words to that effect. On this occasion, when the question was put, and King Heathman had answered, "Eleven, sir," the rector paused. Then he whispered, "Would you like Undecima?"

"Aw, sir, proper. Let's ha' 'en," was the eager answer.

The rector hesitated. Across his classical mind flashed the Latin numbers ahead. The twelfth princess would have to be christened Duodecima, and after that such names became impossible. So he whispered, "Undecima is too much like Decima. We must think of something else."

"As yew like, sir," said his accommodating Majesty, although in distinctly disappointed tones.

"Now there will be an Annie," murmured those villagers who were nearest the font and had overheard the discussion.

While the rector was deliberating his eyes fell among flowers, the church happening to be decorated for a festival, and bunches of the white cluster-rose known as the Seven Sisters being twined about the font; and he suggested that, if King Heathman

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was agreeable, a batch of flower-named princesses would be a pleasing relief after the dull monotony of numbers.

"'Twill du fine, sir," said King Heathman.

And that is how the Prncess Rosa came to be christened.

But princesses went on filling the palace, and names were soon running short again. Rosa had been followed by Lilia, Viola, and Veronica. King Heathman was becoming fastidious. He had imbibed so much raw material of knowledge from the court chaplain that he was beginning to regard himself as a scholar of some importance. Then his royalty was increasing in Lew; and he always wore a hard hat, which, in this part of the country, is a sign, not exactly of majesty, but of stability and respectability. He still hankered after the numbers, and was looking forward to the birth of a twentieth princess who could be called Vicesima. The fifteenth princess had just made her appearance, and the father continued to disregard the petition of the neighbours praying him to call her Annie before it was too late. It happened one day that he cast his eyes upon two flowering shrubs which grew in pots, one at each side of the palace gates. King Heathman could not remember the name of these shrubs, though he had been told often enough, so he called Tertia, and asked her to enlighten him.

"The name is on the tip of my tongue, but I can't get it out," said Tertia. "I'll call Una."

Una is court encyclopædia. She appeared with her beautiful hair ruffled, for she had been deep in arithmetic when Tertia called her, trying to paper

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an imaginary room, having most impossible angles, with imaginary wall-paper at the ridiculous price of one penny three-farthings a yard.

"What be the name o' thikky plant?" asked His Majesty.

"That is a hydrangea," said Una, in a delightfully prim and pedantic fashion; and then she slipped back to her wall-papering at a penny three-farthings a yard.

"What b'est going to call the new maiden?" shouted the blacksmith a few moments later over the palace gates.

"Hydrangea," answered King Heathman grimly. Then he went into the state apartments to break the news to his wife, leaving the blacksmith to have a fit upon the road, or to go on to his smithy and have it there.

For the first time Queen Heathman rebelled. She said it was ridiculous to give the child a name like that: she was surprised that the rector should have thought of it, and she——

But at that point her husband interrupted with the famous remark of the White Knight to Alice: "'Tis my own invention."

This gave Queen Heathman free licence to exercise her tongue. She talked botany for some time, and concluded with some such words as: "You'll call the poor maids vegetables next. If us ha' another maiden you'll call her Broad Bean, I reckon, and the next Scarlet Runner."

"One Scarlet Runner be plenty, my dear," said her husband, with regal pleasantry.

"What du ye mean?"

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"B'ain't your tongue one, my dear?"

This was a libel, for Queen Heathman is remarkably silent—for a woman. She had to laugh at her husband's little joke. They have always been a devoted couple, and this little tiff was in perfect good-humour. Finally, King Heathman went off to the rectory, where he discovered the court chaplain and the Home Secretary chatting upon the lawn. Without any preamble he disclosed his difficulty, and proposed that the fifteenth princess should be named Hydrangea. There was no seconder. The motion was declared lost, and the subject was thrown open for discussion.

The Home Secretary suggested that the princess just born and her eleven successors should be given the names of the months; and when he rolled forth such stately titles as Januaria, Februaria, Martia, His Majesty trembled. However, it occurred to him there might not be sufficient princesses to exhaust the months, and he stated with much dignity of language that he should not like to have an incomplete set. Then the Christian virtues were suggested, Faith, Patience, Charity, Mercy, Hope; but King Heathman would have none of them, not because he despised the virtues, but because he considered that his daughters had them all.

Then the rector interposed in his quiet manner: "The child shall ye called Serena."

"What du 'en mean, sir?" asked King Heathman eagerly.

"It means free from care."

"That's it, sir—that's it," said His Majesty, expressing satisfaction in his usual way.

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"It is an appropriate name," the rector went on. "It implies a perfectly happy condition. There may be dangers, but the girl shall not know of them. There may be difficulties, but she shall not be aware of them—at least, we will hope so," he added with a smile.

"Thank ye, sir," said King Heathman. "And what will be the next name?" he asked hopefully.

"The next?" said the rector, still in his classical musings. "Why, the next child shall be called Placida."

But for some reason or other the Princess Placida has never come to claim her name. Serena appears to be the last. She is still a toddler. Almost any day of the week you may see her, fat and jolly, and extremely free from care, staggering between Septima and Octava as they go a-milking. She is generally embracing a yellow and very ugly cat, in lieu of a doll. If you ask her name, she is just able to lisp, "I'se Swena."

The gossips of Lew have revenged themselves upon King Heathman. They refuse to call the baby Serena. They call her Annie.

And they are all living happily ever afterwards.

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XIII

MATRIMONY

BETROTHAL

THERE was always a civilisation of the heart. Cultivated fields might be few, houses be mean, a gibbet stand upon the hill, the black death rage, but where a few were gathered together there would be love: in any age, even the darkest: in any place, even Widdecombe in the cold country: in the time of plague and superstition, in the time of oppression and fear of kings, in the time of ignorance, fighting often, and exposure to all the wild winds, in the time of squalor, God would not go. All that we know of these people of the past is that they were ruled by the heart, and there was little of happiness in their lives but love. Their manners would have been strange to us, and we should have understood no word of their rough dialect. Therefore we may only translate their feelings, which we know were the same as ours, into the language we can speak and read.

Straight and tall as now, but then new, rose the tower from Widdecombe church-town. The village had emptied itself into the church, for it was early morning, Mass time, and Sir Robert Mareschall

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was late. It was only a weekday, no festival, yet the church was full, and strange savages from the moor, unbelieving and yet desiring protection, knelt in the porch. Do not forget this was the age of darkness, when men came to church because they knew no better. The eyes of all were upon the pyx, suspended in the form of a dove from a chain above the high altar, before it a red light, behind it the crucifix. All things were in order, nothing costly, for Widdecombe was not wealthy, but all the vessels and vestments were worthy, very different from the neighbouring parish of Ashburton where the pyx was made of wood and had no lock, the Nuptial Veil was ragged, the Missal was rotten and moth-eaten, and there was not even an image of the blessed patron saint. Every child in Widdecombe knew what a goodly vessel held the incense in their church, how beautiful the Holy Chrism, how perfect the Gradale and the Antiphonale, how fine the linen cloths; and as for the vestments, had they not stared often at Sir Robert's festival cope fastened by gorgeous morse, which they had no doubt at all was a finer jewel than any of the King's.

Henry, the eighth of his royal name, the God-hater, was not yet born. The church was still free and everywhere the centre of life and love; and the priests, bearing the courtesy title of "Sir," were then the fathers of their people. Imagination could not easily exaggerate the glories of that church, the splendour or pathos of its ceremonies. The magnificence of its architecture may be guessed by the sight of the Abbey at Westminster, a small, mean building in comparison with the Abbey Churches

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of Reading, Glastonbury, Fountains, and many another, which were to be destroyed by that incarnation of evil who was to bring a stain upon the throne for ever. The age of doubt was far away, nor was there any prophet to foretell the horrors of the Reformation. There was peace at little Widdecombe in the moor.

Yet in the church was a sound like brawling. Men were very ignorant and earnest. The sun was high above the tors, and each man had his daily toil awaiting, but could not go to it until he had received the blessing and had seen his God made upon the altar. There were voices and mutterings almost savage, and when Sir Robert appeared from the vestry and slowly mounted to the holy place, they broke out. The men were rough, wild with excitement and some terror, lest their priest should have lost the power to bring God down.

"Haste, Sir Robert, haste!" they cried aloud; and some stood up and held their arms out.

"My horses wait. Hold up my God that I may see Him."

"Father!" cried a man, "I have far to go this day. I must look on Jesus Christ before I go."

"Peace, my children," said Sir Robert; and began the Mass.

Those whose duties were urgent departed after the Elevation, secure for that day against witches and the power of the devil: many remained to the end, among them a girl and boy, a fair couple, lately betrothed, although neither had reached the age of twenty, but folk married young in those days, children in face and children in beauty, Anthonie

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Byland and Petronel Layne. They were to be married when the priest thought fitting.

As Sir Robert came out of church they joined him, one on each side, and walked on, with hands holding his, like children with their father, towards his house. The priest was not learned, and he talked a dialect which we should not comprehend—even the great men of Lydford or Exeter town spoke much the same—and he wrote a letter with exceeding difficulty, finding many different ways of spelling his name, recorded for us as Mareschall which we should render to-day by Marshall; but he was a holy man, always on the side of the Widdecombe tinners against the Court of Stannary—had not the tower of his church, still accounted one of the most beautiful in England, been built as a labour of love by these same tinners?—always in communion with his people and knowing their troubles before ever they brought them to him.

"Father," said Anthonie, "shall we not be married very soon? 'Tis hard to wait."

"Nay, child, ha' patience," said the old man, pretending to be gruff. "Why, 'twas only a year or two agone, as it seems, I purified thy mother for bearing thee, and as for this young maiden——"

"Father, I am sixteen," cried Petronel.

"Od's pitikins, maid, was it not last Invention o' the Holy Rood thy god-sibs brought thee to the door o' church, and when I spake in the words of the office, 'Quid petis—what seekest thou?' thy father answered, 'Baptismum,' and I raised thee in my arms, and most horribly thou didst howl?"

"Father, father! It was long years ago."

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"Longer than thou canst mind. And now thou wouldst be wed. Where is the ring, my Anthonie?"

"I will ride my pony into Ayspertone town, and buy it of the silver-merchant there."

"Returning, child, the wild Gubbins will set about and take it from thee."

"I would break their heads with my cudgel and ride over them."

Sir Robert looked at the young lovers tenderly, pressing a hand of each to his side. Life hung upon a thread, any day it might be cut by the sword of violence or broken by the arrow of pestilence; from the sword he, as a priest, was safe, but he knew that when Anthonie went to Ashburton for the ring, the black death might return with him, or he might be drawn into some quarrel and not return at all. It was an age when the fear of death was ever-present, when young people were eager for the Nuptial Mass, to secure their short-lived happiness, knowing too well that the Mass for the dead might follow soon.

"The season of Advent is near," said Sir Robert gravely. "Then cometh Epiphany and the cold weather, and after that the forty days. The Church does not love a winter's bride. Then cometh May, Petronel."

"The maypole and the flower-dance. I was queen two years ago."

"Thou shalt be queen again, queen of thy husband and his home. The last day of the month is the festival of thy patron, child, Petronilla, virgin and not martyr, even as thou art. There are nocturnes at midnight and daybreak, for the

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feast falls within the Octave of Holy Trinity, and thou shalt bring flowers for the holy place, my maid."

"Thou wilt bless us then, Father?" cried Anthonie.

"June, child, June," said Sir Robert hastily. "I do not love a May marriage."

It seemed a long wait for the lovers: through the rest of autumn, the stretch of winter, and much of spring. It seemed to them a penance for sins they had not committed, but Sir Robert was wise. It was not well for a young couple to start the new life near winter, with the storms and cold weather to try them. June was the time for a bride to blush, a time for love, when nature unaided would make the home lovely, and each green oak would become a tree of heaven. It was good for them to wait a little, to feel the trials of the cold country bringing them nearer, knitting their souls together in a miraculous way, so that neither could laugh without an echo, or sigh without answer; and when the frost and snow had departed, and the time of probation was over, they would kneel beneath the Nuptial Veil, and be welded joint by joint in body as in soul. Their earthly parents claimed them only for daily duties. Now that they were betrothed their spiritual father, Sir Robert, and their spiritual mother, the Church, had full control over the lives of Anthonie and Petronel.

So the winter came, as it must, dark and somewhat awful, and the lovers were frightened. There was a horror upon them as of the end of things; and they drew closer like children in the night, passing along hand in hand, speaking brave words

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to encourage one another, while the winds howled about them, and the waters roared, and everything seemed to be dead except love. Sir Robert watched them, and was glad, knowing that their hearts were right; and each week, on a cold dark morning in the church of little Widdecombe in the wind, he said a Mass for their welfare, murmuring in secret, "We receiving this Sacrament of our everlasting salvation, entreat thy mercy, O Lord, that by it Thou wouldst preserve Thy servants, Anthonie and Petronel, from all adversity." That kindly love of the Mother and Father welled from the altar and reached the children; and yet they were frightened, for the country would not live.

"It is not the time of death," said Sir Robert. "It is the time of birth."

They could not understand him, for it was December. They walked beneath the naked trees, feeling that they must keep together or they would be lost. Why was Nature so prodigal of her charms in spring, so miserly in those days which seemed to belong to no season at all? It would have been so easy for the God of life to have appointed a Sacrament of winter, a new miracle which might have sprinkled the wood and spotted the fields with as many flowers as in May, frost-resisting things like the snowdrop, which being white, asks for no sunshine. There was impatience in that question when they saw the nakedness of the land, shuddering and pulling sheets of cold water over its body for shame, murmuring, "Do not look at me now." Nature seemed bankrupt: she could not pay for even one hour of sunshine every day; and the holy

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marriage tie was being violated, as it seemed; the solemn union between God and the earth was in danger of dissolution; a writ of divorce had issued; a few more of those intolerable showers of ice must surely establish the decree, unless some divine attorney from the spiritual court should intervene. Sir Robert and the Church were after all powerless; they could not offer up a Mass which by its magic should make the trees burst into leaf and restore their sun to them.

If there was to be no more matrimony, what then? If the holiest bond of all was broken, what hope for lovers? The spiritual parents knew nothing of divorce; that was in the hands of the Holy Father, who was as much outside the world of hearts and kisses as God Himself. But with these fears Sir Robert came and walked with the children, often in body, sometimes in spirit, pointing out to them what they had missed; and by the virtue of his eyes their own were opened.

Who was this riding through the wood upon a goat, amid a shower of brown leaves, with a face as bright as a berry, who but the spirit of winter—not the old cripple December, not the wreck of the year, old, worn-out time, with broken and dinted rubbish of hour-glass and scythe, a white wisp of hair streaming across his lantern-jaws; but the immortal spirit of the resurrection, a being of child-like eagerness and soft eyes? Here was no old Nestor, croaking of past days, but Robin Good-fellow; no quack with some celestial tincture to make the old young again, but a merry fellow looking forward, a laughing fellow, without whom

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Nature would be lost; everything that fell to the ground to rest a little, feigning death like a cunning beast, pleading it as an excuse for idleness, would for lack of that laughing spirit take more than the outward image of death, would not germinate, and a cold seal would be placed upon that spot whence life must issue.

The children, walking after Benediction in the wood, felt the presence of this glad spirit, and as they clung together heard him speak, just as Sir Robert spoke, when it was time for muttering, as the little bell tinkled, and the incense hid him in a fog:

"You call me winter, lovers. I am the good physician. I remove old growths and deliver the branches of buds. With my gales I amputate diseased limbs, rubbing in my frost to prevent decay. With my snow I purify the soil. And when my work is done I go a-mumming, with a wreath of holly round my head, and wherever I pass the rowan-wood is flung upon the fire, and I hear folk say, "It is the beginning, not the end."

The light was going out, the darkness increased, the waters were rising. The lovers trembled because the world seemed fiercer, and matrimony was, like heaven, far away. And yet never had the heaven looked so near. The atmosphere was clear with frost; they could see Orion striding across the sky, and great Sirius, sun of winter. Their eyes were opened, and they saw things which were a great way off.

"Spring is my son," went on the muttering. "He shirks his work, comes to it late, and often

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puts it off until to-morrow; but he never fails lovers, for when I frighten him with frost he grows serious, and comes along the wood whistling with a warm west wind. Here is what I leave to him—all that I have. Life, lovers! New life!"

The children were beginning to understand. Here was no bequest of dead wood, but life, young life, like their own. The bareness of the beginning resembled the nakedness of the end, although there was neither beginning nor end. In the alphabet of time Aleph the ox wears the yoke of the long O: the two ends are lost in one circle, so that no man shall take an hour, nor yet a day, and say, "here we begin," or, "here we end." This winter god was the herald of the resurrection, and all that followed was part of rough December, proceeding out of the strength of his days, his darkness, and his storms.

The lovers heard the noise upon the moor and within the wood. As they walked they found waters in flood, mists hanging low, the wind beating ash against oak, dead leaves sweeping down the slopes, the light ghastly, the world breaking. Emptiness, desolation, decay; and all life departing in a whirlwind.

And yet it was not so; now at last they knew it was not so, because their love was higher. Life was returning in that whirlwind. That noise which they heard around was no dirge, but the march of God in triumph. It was the sound of His water-pipes and wind rejoicing over the conquest of death. This noise was to arouse the sleeping plants, the winds were to shake the slumbering trees into life

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again. Winter thundered, and shouted "Awake!" and each stirred a little and opened a bud to answer.

The lovers could not see the soil out of which the oak-tree grew, because of the mantle of russet leaves. In them was a form of death, but they were not dead; they melted into the earth and nourished the roots which gave the tree strength to bear green again. Fruit also was among the leaves, acorns, some green, some brown, and the delicate cups which they had grown from. They saw what they called the nakedness of the tree, the bareness of the boughs; and then, at the word of Benediction, the mist and the rain-cloud passed, and the twigs growing at the level of their eyes were clothed, covered with infant buds, brown every one, small and willing to burst into green clusters when the call came. These rustling leaves, which the tree had put off, even as a man throws his threadbare cloak from him and takes another, these green fingers which caught at the breezes and caressed sunbeams, were sent to the ground, not by any process of death, but by the gradual birth and rising of the bud beneath; they were cast off by life; and now the lovers saw that life throbbing upon every tree in a host of buds which could not be numbered, all silent as yet in the midst of the tumult, because the time of matrimony had not yet come.

And at last there was allowed a day as young as April: not warm, for there was a frost on the other side of the sunshine, but coloured like a Missal-page, water-colours all, no hot and thick September oils, but liquid stuff, dripping, nothing stagnant, faint

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blue turning into grey on the sky-line, and pink cherubic lip pouting at the edge of the clouds. A rare colour that pink, and easy to remember. On such a day Anthonie and Petronel descended from the heights, where snow lay unbroken, but below not a flake; and as they came into a rough brake, where the bracken of the year that had been was crumpled in its rusty death, they stopped, conscious both of colour that was music. Behind them the sun, in front a bush of holly on fire with berries and sunset; nothing more. One bush of holly among hundreds, and yet something was there they had never seen before; a glory, a transfiguration; the bush burnt and was not consumed. During those few moments every sense was satisfied, nothing more was needed, no other ceremony, no more Sacramental presence, not even a kiss. Life had risen high, run over, and the part that was spilled passed down and melted into the light on that holly-bush. And then, though the sun had not gone, the colour was there no longer; the bush became cold and as the others, the fire went out; and as Anthonie and Petronel watched the sacred embers dying, and the berries darkening one by one, they clung to each other again, frightened no longer, but full of happiness and hope, as those who had been shown the Sacrament of the resurrection of life, who had opened the gates of a grave prepared to shudder at the corpse, and had found instead, neither death, nor yet decay, but a living child, with wonder of the world in its young eyes.

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BLESSING OF THE RING

There must be joy of life in June, or not at all. They who are sad then must keep their sadness, but let them not walk in the way of lovers. There was joy upon little Widdecombe in the moor, happy Widdecombe, not yet famous in legend as the dwelling-place of the devil, nor consumed by lightning and fire-balls; no shadow yet of the awful day when the priest was to be dragged from his moorland home, to be hanged and quartered for the sin of obeying the voice of God rather than the voice of a devil. No man then living was to see that day. It was peaceful in the vale of Widdecombe, cut off from the world by the heaving moor, and its rude folk were happy because they knew no other life. Few even of the old had travelled more than a dozen miles away. Sir Robert alone had passed through the gates of Exanceaster, as Exeter was then called. There was joy, because it was the eve of St. Boniface, and Anthonie and Petronel were to be married in the morning.

See them walking in the valley for the last time separated. On St. Boniface's day they would be made one altogether, two bodies and one flesh, joined by that awful presence, which seemed to them both alive and thrilling in the midst of the incense, when Sir Robert muttered it down and into being. Ah, but they were ignorant, these pretty children. They knew not how to write or read those twisted letters in the psalter. They had but a few words which they kept on using. They would run after

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the priest like babies, to hold his hands, and steal a blessing from him. They knew that God was good, that He lived partly in a place called heaven, and partly in the white dove which quivered before the altar, and they knew that if they offended Him their marriage would be stopped by lightning. What else? They knew how to love. It was a mighty power in their healthy bodies; not a gentle flower-like thing in that June sunshine, but something stronger, half savage, like the rivers as they had been during winter, tearing away obstacles with white flood-water. In December love had been like the song of a bird at evening; in April as the flight of a butterfly; in May it was a hunger and thirst. And now upon the eve it was a kind of death, a feeling that life was over, and a restless sleep beginning: a forgetfulness of the world of fighting and disease, for they were almost out of it, and could not remember they had to go back: a vision of a spiritual life beyond, among golden clouds; and yet all the time this earthly life was gnawing them, and they had to be away from others, eating their own food of each other's breath, adoring fair skin and soft hair, biting the tips of fingers, sighing and moaning like two gentle breezes meeting round the turret of the tower. Forgive them if they knew only one thing well. For they were wise.

It was evening, the first shadows were crossing, when Sir Robert, walking in his garden, lifted up his eyes and saw the children of his thoughts approaching, with the glory and shyness of new life upon their faces. It was a time for whispering:

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there was too much mystery in the air for declamation, the church would not like to hear laughter, and there is a form of happiness which is beyond it and brings tears. The place was solemn, so were the young flowers asleep, Petronel also hung her head, and there was little colour on her face; for the great Mother was so near, and she knew that Sir Robert had been walking hand in hand with God through the garden, recommending Anthonie and herself to His love.

"The ring, my Father," said Anthonie, holding it out.

A plain and simple thing, made not of gold but of silver, because silver was by the church accounted purer than gold, and being pure it signified the inward affection which ought ever to be fresh between husband and wife. Sir Robert took it, let it drop into the hollow of his hand, and whispered, "Come, my children."

The ring was then unworthy to be worn by a bride, because it was a thing cursed by Satan, who hates lovers; it might contain some spell, the evil eye might have overlooked it, and, like any inanimate object which was to be applied to a sacred purpose, it had to be sanctified, in order that the evil spirit then possessing it might be driven out.

It was very soothing in the church; around it winds murmured, but they seemed far away. The lamp before the pyx looked like a star to guide the wanderers home. The children knelt and signed themselves, Sir Robert passed to the vestry, and soon they stood beside the stoup of holy water, the priest holding the ring with the first three fingers

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of his right hand—so precise were the rubrics—and on each side of him Anthonie and Petronel stood holding a lighted candle, which gave all the light to the world that was needful for the short and simple ceremony. There was a versicle and response, two short prayers, twice was the ring blessed and signed; and then Sir Robert took a little holy water which he sprinkled upon it, and the miracle was accomplished. Henceforth the ring would be holy, proof against all enchantments and the wiles of the devil; nor would any act of its wearer suffice to make it again a thing of evil, for the ring once blessed remained holy for ever.

SOLEMNISATION

The sun was weak, the day still wet, when the bells began; and there was a goodly mist upon the hills, like smoke of superstition before the rood concealing mysteries. Sweet smells were in the valley where old gardens made a fragrance, and already the air was humming with work-a-day bees; so who would not rise and be up ready for marriage, who could lie abed in that young June of red blood and blue sky, who would not hasten to be at the door, and see the white bride shimmering in the mist?

Anthonie, before the night was out, ran often to the door to wish the clouds away. Sir Robert awoke like a bird at the first light: the service was early, for the people had their work, and it was necessary for him to take it fasting. Ask not of Petronel. She has been toying with white garments

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for an hour or two, lying hidden like a dove in a wood, murmuring a litany, and with little gasps of fear clutching a fylfot cross that swung as a charm from her neck.

There was not much music: only children singing as they waited for the bride, while the old sun, thinking he was to be worshipped again, came out and searched for his altars on the hill-top. Sir Robert, wise priest to choose a June morning, left his house, beheld the churchyard full, and perhaps sighed, considering how soon the summer went with life and youth, how soon Anthonie and Petronel, children as they were, would stand no longer over, but with him under, while others just as eager would be over them waiting for child-brides then unborn; but the mother would live on, and the immortal mysteries of the altar, so he thought, and was happy to be no prophet, happy not to see the altars overthrown, the sacred lamp extinguished, the church a dry shell humming with cold wind, and matrimony the sport of law-courts. It was the age of ignorance, and he was satisfied; and if there was a shadow on that morning it would be cast by the thought that here was the ending of a romance, nothing to others, but so great to them; for marriage is an ending, the end of youth, of that wild, restless struggle with hot life, a beginning of peace and better things; and the joining together of two he had baptised must surely remind Sir Robert that his own change was not a great way off.

The bells ceased. Children were still singing softly, not heeding much the words, for their eyes were busy, while their elders murmured, and the

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very old were garrulous with whispers. Petronel was coming, surrounded by her relations. An anxious time for her and them. Spells of witchcraft were in the air, the evil one was doing his utmost to mar her happiness, the eye of the smallest child in that assembly might prove disastrous. Nobody must see her face, not even the bridegroom, for Satan might put some evil thought into his heart, and it might be cast from his eyes upon the bride, and take effect before she became one with him. Even the glances of admiration might have been dangerous had they fallen upon a face uncovered. Therefore she was hidden by the bridal veil, a custom which has survived, and in an unlearned age has been explained as necessary to hide the blushes of the bride.

The ordeal of passing between the people was over, and they stood together before the door of the church, as the rubric required, before the face of the Mother Church, in the presence of God, the priest, and the people; and Anthonie stood at the right side of Petronel, not as a sign of his superiority as a man, but because Eve was formed from a rib taken out of the left side of Adam. Sir Robert gazed about him, and began to speak, not in priestly Latin, but in the old mother tongue:

"Brethren, we are gathered together in the sight of God and His angels, and all the saints, in the face of the Church, to join together two persons, to wit, this man and this woman——"

He paused, and folding his arms looked upon them, as he was bound to do, in order that he might know them if God called to him at any time, and

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said, "Who are these that you have joined together in My Name?" He saw the fine eyes of Anthonie, the drooping head of Petronel, and he smiled and put out a hand as if he would caress them; for they were his children, and he loved them.

"That whatsoever they may have done aforetime, henceforth they may be one body yet two souls, in the faith and law of God."

He turned and charged the people sternly, that if any of them knew any cause why Anthonie and Petronel could not lawfully make contract of matrimony, he should declare it; and the same charge he made to the two children: that if they had done aught secretly, or made any vow or knew any impediment, they should at once confess it; but he hardly stayed for an answer, knowing more of their lives than any man living. And turning himself about, he asked, "What dower has this woman?" smiling again as he referred to the slight, trembling figure with that stately term.

It was time for Petronel's father to look up and mutter of the ponies, the good cow, the linen, and some few articles of furniture, which were to be his daughter's contribution to the home: useful articles, but no money. Little of that was known, and little was needful. The answer was sufficient, although the question was formal—had not Petronel gone over every item with Sir Robert many a time? And so he turned to the bridegroom, and asked in his gentle English voice:

"Anthonie, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife; wilt thou love, honour, hold and cherish her, in health and in sickness, as a husband

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should a wife, and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live ? "

Not a moment passed before the answer came, " I will."

The time of probation was over, sickness and death had been avoided, and the last effort of the winter conquered. Here was the reward coming after those weeks of doubtings and fears, lest the day might never come, of horror in the dark weeks lest God should forbid the banns and not allow such happiness this side heaven. Everything had been conquered, even self, during those days of warm winds and pale primroses; and now the joy and the light and the colour of life and the year were at their full, and the mists of the morning were streaming from the tors.

" Petronel, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband; wilt thou obey and serve him; love, honour, and cherish him in health and sickness, as a wife should a husband, and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live ? "

The answer was inaudible, but Sir Robert guessed the words shaped by her quivering lips, and his own moved in the form of a benediction. The child dreams, he thought, and was not wrong, for Petronel was in her soul within the church, struggling towards that dove behind the lamp, imploring the mystery to give them time, much time, love and yet more love, year after year, kiss after kiss, embrace upon embrace, no cooling, no end, no death: a miracle, if it were possible to that miracle; only let them live, let them live June after June, and

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not die; keep the shadows away and the Holy Chrism from their door; and let not the candles be lighted and the Black Mass muttered for them, for they were so young, and the miracle was so old, yet fresh every day, and, if it would, it could keep them, like itself, alive.

Her hand was being lifted by her father, her little white hand, which was uncovered because she was a maid; and this little hand was given to Sir Robert, as if it had not been hers to dispose of; and the old priest held it for a few moments in his warm grasp, feeling it gently moving and throbbing, and pressing his fingers round it reassuringly, before he passed it into the right hand of Anthonie, eager to receive it that he might give his bride the troth, saying after Sir Robert presently in the soft old English words:

"I, Anthonie, take the Petronel, to my wedded wyf, to have and to holde fro this day forwarde, for better for wors, for richere for poorer, in sykenesse and in hele, tyl dethe us departe, if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne, and therto I plight the my trouthe."

The hands withdrew, only for a moment, that the sensation of touch and the joy of union might be renewed, and this time by Petronel. Now it was Anthonie's right hand that came to hers, brought to its happy home by the priest, who was beginning to murmur those words which she had by heart, like all maids, matrons, or widows, near and far. She still trembled, but not with fear, more as the flower fluttering in sunshine at the pleasant touch of a breeze; and the small, childish voice was clear, even to the old folk, who had their hands

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behind their ears, leaning forward to listen and think and have their dream of memory :

"I, Petronel, take the Anthonie, to my wedded housbonder, to have and to holde fro this day forwarde, for better for wors, for richere for poorer, in sykenesse and in hele, to be bonere and buxum in bedde and at the borde, tyl dethe us departe, if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne, and therto I plight the my trouthe."

Again the hands were withdrawn. All fear was at an end ; life was theirs. Face to face they stood before the priest, the church, and the great Absent One, there nevertheless, and saw the world idealised, each tree and leaf, mountain and river, an emblem of the heaven beautiful ; not things of the earth, not common types of landscape, but bound up with their souls, their feelings, and their eyes, into the form, colour, and life of that new spiritual state which was theirs. All material things melted into the blessed vapour of holy incense, taking a new shape, making a new earth, theirs, and for them alone. Their hands felt, and their eyes saw, nothing tangible, even the rocks became made of cloud-stuff, the trees were sacraments, the sacred fire of the lamp, the holy water, were protecting angels. There was no separation by death. All things in Nature were joined together, and all the powers of darkness combined could not part them asunder. Real life was theirs, not the outward form alone, but the inward and spiritual part, visible then to their eyes, as the veil, which had covered the hitherto unseen earth of God and the garden which He had planted, dropped, and all things fashioned upon the six

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days stood forth revealed, surrounded with that flame and vapour of the Sacramental elements divine; and beyond, far beyond earth and sea, where surely no mortal eye had ever reached before, were still more luminous expanses, passing from infinite wonders of a new daylight, into a succession of twilights, through all manner of clouds, making music as they shifted, and tinted cities of the saints; and so at last into the eternity, where there was still a promise of life, more happiness and divine passion, more matrimony, for a lamp was burning far away in the infinite before the great altar of the home of wonder and of love.

Stories increased about the enchanted lovers, tales of the woods, rivers, and flowers, making phantoms of the wedding-guests, leaving but one figure clear, the vested body and calm face of the old father who had wafted over them the spirit of enchantment. Bride had been united to bridegroom, earth had been joined to heaven, spirit had been wedded to matter, and the issue of these marriages were gods; so that the trees were no longer vegetable growths, but dryads, the hills were oreads, the wood where they had walked and trembled was a nymph, and the river was an angel with long hair. All matter became absorbed by symbolism, with a sympathy and fellowship for matrimony; leaves and stems, blossoms and fruit, running water and granite hills, were spirits singing a love song, and clustering with benediction round the bridal veil.

Thus mortal children put on immortality. Not for them the ravines and chasms, where waters

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roared in perpetual twilight, those horrible dark noondays, the obscured moons, and dusks of deep forest roads where fungi grew and reptiles squatted. Such things were not for matrimony; the veil and the fylot cross defended the bride and him she loved against them. Theirs were the meadow of myrtle and the fields of golden flowers, where they would wander hand in hand and heart in heart beside the blue and the green of whispering streams, beneath the sycamores, the rowans, and white birches, waiting for the grain to ripen and the fruit to form, watching the scented breezes blowing the long grasses up and down. Theirs were the blush of rose-thickets, the embroidery of honeysuckles, and the twining things of pink and white hiding themselves with green stuff, as if bashful of their beauty. And their home would be a fair garden blessed by St. Francis, planted with all manner of fragrant herbs, and sanctified by angels' visits.

A dream, but who would break it? Who would sweep away symbolism and restore the storm, terror of the sword, and heartache? Not Sir Robert, as he put forward a dish to receive the offerings, gold, silver, and the ring which had been blessed; all for the bride, the gold and silver for the needs of this world, the ring for her soul. Sir Robert took it, and Anthonie receiving it from him with the first three fingers of his right hand, and holding in his left Petronel's right hand, spoke after the priest the words:

"With this rynge I the wed, and this gold and silver I the geve; and with my body I the worshipe, and with all my wordely cathel I the endowe."

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And then he placed the ring upon the thumb of his bride, still holding it, and presently beginning the invocation he removed it, at the name of the Father to the first finger, at the name of the Son to the second, and at the name of the Holy Ghost to the third. And there he was to leave it, because in that finger the church believed was a certain vein which reached to the heart.

With bowed heads they stood, while Sir Robert lifting up his hand, made the sign of the cross over them, and in the name of the Lord who made the world out of nothing, blessed their union. Then followed the sixty-eighth psalm, which was said, not sung, ordinary versicles and the Lord's Prayer, more versicles and responses; and then Sir Robert completed the ceremony at the door with another blessing, one complete and full, covering their lives upon earth and through eternity, the chief of the blessings, apart from the great Sacramental benediction which was to come, and could be given only by the Host. Drawing himself up, with the same tender smile, Sir Robert extended both his hands over the bowed heads, and as he slowly made the sign of their redemption, said in a loud, clear voice in the Latin tongue:

"God the Father bless you; Jesus Christ keep you; the Holy Ghost enlighten you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be merciful unto you; turn His countenance unto you and give you peace; and so fill you with all spiritual benediction for the remission of your sins, that ye may have eternal life and live for ever."

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BENEDICTION

The Father had finished. It was now time for Mother Church to make two one with magic. Before the people Anthonie and Petronel were man and wife, but in the sight of the Church they were not united until they had been presented at the altar, heard Mass, received the spiritual food and benediction. The Mass and the blessing; these were the powers by which the Church ruled every heart and life, making the altar the very centre of human existence in those rude days, when the home was very simple and the thread of life most weak. There was but one service—the Mass; all other ceremonies were a part of the one, a preliminary to the sacrifice; matrimony belonged to the order of the Mass, the burial of the dead followed Mass, and through all rang the fine clear note of blessing. Obscured by rites the ceremonies might be, darkened with all manner of words, but out of the mist simplicity emerged—the magic of consecration and the sign of the cross; so much and no more, except curses, which were rare and too terrible for use. It was a blessing that the people asked for; for that they waited at the door of the church in the early morning, for that they neglected every duty of the world, for that the knight and the statesman sought the cloister. Without that blessing they could not live and dared not die. And the Church was lavish, she could not bless enough, she endured to bless; and the people loved her because she was then a church of love.

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Twice had the young couple been blessed at the door, six times before Mass began they were to be blessed at the altar, as a preliminary to the Sacramental blessing which secured the marriage bond; and in their own home more blessings must be bestowed upon them before the night began.

Sir Robert passed towards the rood screen, saying the hundred and twenty-eighth psalm, the bride and bridegroom followed, while the congregation filled the seats with a gentle scuffling. The sun was well above the mists, fighting its way like a hero across the heights, putting the golden candlelight to shame, making a mystic haze about the altar, where dust floated, and a butterfly flickered. Out of these fiery beams of June came the voice of Sir Robert, slowly and solemnly bestowing the six blessings: the blessing of the God of Heaven, the blessing of the God of the Patriarchs, the blessing of the God of the Angels, the blessing of the God of Anthonie and Petronel, the blessing of the God of Adam and Eve, and the special blessing of the God of all Blessings. The richness of these blessings like the day of warmth, clear sky, and flowers seemed to fill the land with happiness and colour.

The Mass began: it was that ordained for Trinity Sunday, with a special memorial of the bride and bridegroom, referred to secretly as, "Thy servants whom Thou hast seen fit to bring to man's estate and the day of espousal." The altar was covered with three linen cloths, of which one had been blessed, six candles of a pound weight each were lighted upon the beam above the altar, and two more before Our Lady's image; five smaller ones

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were lighted in a bronze corona before the step of the altar. The children were brought into the holy place, and set upon the south side, Petronel at Anthonie's right hand, between him and the altar, so that she might be protected upon either side, by the one who had sworn to devote his life and soul and the adoration of the body to her, and by the mysteries and the Presence lingering in the candle-light, the savour of incense, and the odour of flowers; protection in the highest. It was good there, and very warm with light of many kinds. There was no more loneliness, no longing, no need for that little red heart to pant for love. Perfection had been attained, there upon earth, which was not earth then, but a chalice all made of gold and filled with what looked like fire, but did not burn; and through this element they moved, thrilling, gasping for joy, and in some wondrous way it made them one.

A cloud surrounded them. They were being censed with unblessed incense, being creatures of free-will, capable of sin, so that incense which had been blessed was not for them. The cloud hid the world from their sight, left them alone together in their own new heaven, surrounded them with the spiritual presence of saints and angels, and the fragrance of a June in paradise; and after that the blessing, for out of the smoke was to come a Figure to give them the peace and the promise of eternal life, to marry them, not for a day, nor for a life, but for all time; to make of their twin souls one instrument of music tuned to the song of angels, to add to them beauty, sweet-scented blossom and fair fruit, like the tree of the mountains, covered

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at that hour with a rich whiteness, as the king's daughter all glorious, the Yggdrasil, with its roots in the earth and its topmost branches in heaven, offering an oblation of small apples red as blood.

The Sanctus bell rang, the Canon had been reached; the two children, lost in wonder and amazement, saw the white folds of the Nuptial Veil. Like creatures of a dream they knelt at the step of the altar, and the order was to pray, but they could not: all the few simple words they knew were far away, their thoughts were confused; they could only murmur, "My wife," or "My husband"; they could only ask, "Bless Anthonie," or "Bless Petronel," and could only add, "Let us live, O God, let us live." And while thus kneeling and bowed together, they were conscious of the veil being drawn over them, and held at the four corners, like a cloud of glory out of which they were to pass transfigured; there while they knelt, Sir Robert, no longer the tender father, but the awful priest, who could lead them into heaven or spurn them into hell, was muttering the words of enchantment which would draw that Figure down to bless them. They were conscious that the miracle was accomplished, they felt the silence, they knew when the Eucharistic Fracture was being made, they heard at last the Peace being given; and while they quivered like the folds of the Nuptial Veil on this, the supreme, moment which could never come again, for the Sacramental Blessing was not bestowed on second marriages, the Figure was before them, with a voice, "Bow down yourselves for a blessing." And as they knelt in their white spiritual

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bed, half fainting with fear and love, intoxicated by the sun, the incense, and the Presence, swaying there, hand clasped in hand beneath the pall, the blessing of the Three Pieces of God upon the paten came:

"O God, Who by Thy mighty power madest all things out of nothing; Who also, after other things set in order, didst create for man, made after the image of God, the inseparable help of the woman, that out of man's flesh woman should take her beginning, teaching that what Thou hast been pleased to make one it should never be lawful to put asunder.

"*O God, Who hast consecrated the state of matrimony to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified the sacramental union and marriage of Christ and the Church.*

"O God, by Whom woman is joined to man, and the union, instituted in the beginning, is gifted with that blessing which alone has not been taken away, either through penalty of original sin or the judgment of the deluge; look graciously, we beseech Thee, on this Thine handmaid now to be joined in wedlock, who earnestly desireth to be guarded by Thy protection. Let the yoke of love and peace be upon her; let her be faithful and chaste; let her wed in Christ, and ever remain a follower of holy matrons. Let her be loving to her husband as Rachel, wise as Rebecca, long-lived and faithful as Sara. Let not the father of lies get advantage over her through her doings; let her abide in the bond of faith and precept; being wedded to one man, let her flee all unlawful conversation, and fortify her weakness with the strength of discipline. Let her be grave and bashful, severe and modest,

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well-instructed in heavenly doctrine. Let her be fruitful in child-bearing, well reported of, and innocent, and attain to a desired old age, seeing her children's children unto the third and fourth generation, and finally attaining unto the rest of the blessed and the Kingdom of Heaven."

THE KISS

No power of Church or State could separate them now. The Nuptial Veil was removed, and they rose to their feet, still before the altar, for one ceremony remained, a pure act of love, a token of bodily devotion. The Church permitted, more, demanded it. They could not leave the holy place until God, the priest, and the people had been assured of their affection one for the other. The bride had yet to receive the Sacramental Kiss.

Not a kiss of Anthonie, no lover's kiss, nor that of a husband; he could not give it, he could only give what he had: he must receive it, take it from God this once, and let his wife have it as her own. Here was Sir Robert turning towards him, with lips which the chalice had wetted, and hands which had broken the Host outstretched; hands which had done no violence, lips which had kissed no woman other than a mother, and every day were pressed to holy things, altar, text, vessels, relics, nothing lower. He came through the sunshine, with the gift that had fallen like a star upon his mouth from the centre of life. He came in tenderness, as a man, a priest, and a God, three in one. Upon Anthonie's shoulders he placed his hands, and as a man looked

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into his eyes and smiled a little, thinking of the years behind as he saw the boy stand straight and tall with courage on his face, saw the clean limbs and remembered the child who had been brought to him for baptism, the child he had trained, whose growth he had watched, whose rash impulses he had checked; and as a priest he sighed, thinking of the years to come, the sorrows and the storms, that figure bent, its head frosted, its tongue foolish; and as a God he bent his head and kissed him; then turned aside to pray.

Petronel was ready with uplifted veil and blushing face exposed. Now she was married, and sanctified, no charm could work. She put out her hands; they were seized. She held up her face: for the first time Anthonie saw the lips of a wife. They had passed through great moments, but this, surely this was the chiefest. They saw each other, they recognised each other, not as Anthonie and Petronel, boy and girl, not as lovers, but as husband and wife in the sight of earth and heaven. They were married. Not an act could be too simple, for every act was new. Matrimony, was it not rather second baptism, regenerating both, a baptism of beauty and of strength, making Petronel an angel of loveliness, and Anthonie a hero of the sun? They had been born again, not to sorrow, but to the life beautiful: happiness was heaped upon happiness by that gentle magic of the church. They were small children once again, little people of a tale, created to play with sunshine and the mist, and to dance on the mountain-top, creatures who linked the life they knew of with the land of sunset dreams.

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And what if all this should be a fairy-tale? They were only boy and girl, they were not new forms: millions of others had married, and would marry, of the same form, and differing from them in name alone. That supernatural door stood before all, and every hand, if it willed, could take the golden key: self-same creatures, borrowing nothing from life but names, leaving merely such a record in the register as: "June 5th. Anthonie Byland and Petronel Layne," until the leaf fell to pieces and was lost, and with it their poor lives.

Surely the enchantment would remain, the glamour would be handed on, the story of their love would be repeated; and in that they would endure, and by the kiss become immortal. Only false love would die and be forgotten; the glitter and tinsel of mere passion made the fairy-tale, and that would recede from human view and be lost to sight, while the magnificent realism of their matrimony would live for ever in the drifting mists and solemn twilights, in the echoes of the mountains, and in all the spirit forms of June. No woman could love in vain, nor could any man marry in vain; for every meeting of two hearts made more light in the universe, more stars in space, more lamps beyond.

So their lips came together, and man did eat angels' food before the altar; and with that kiss the doors flew open, and they saw the spirit realm by the added sense of that first contact as man and wife; even as a poet sometimes in blindness touches an image which sweeps aside the barriers and lets him in, or releases the flood of light behind. And they knew that the doors could only remain open

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while they loved; a quarrel might close them, one bitter word would lock them, and the spiritual vision would fade away; and matrimony, which had opened them, would be over; and the golden keys of the blessing and Nuptial Kiss could not be theirs again.

The Mass of matrimony was a Mass of optimism, a Mass of blessing. Love must triumph against fate, the children thus blessed must be happy; they could not fail to win the greatest of all prizes here if their kiss was true. They would be lovers not born for death; their lives would be written in the literature of heaven; they would walk in a path, unsubstantial apparently, like the Milky Way across the sky, or the track of moonlight upon water, there every year, and every age, and always new. Without that nuptial kiss from the heart and soul, the kiss of optimism, the seal upon the bond of matrimony, and without the love that it inspires, nothing that is lovely in all Nature could remain, each life would be a history of shadows, a tale not worth the telling, each day an empty echo, and earth would be joined to heaven, no more with sunbeams, but by a web of hopeless dreams.

Bread and water were brought, blessed by Sir Robert, and offered to the bride and bridegroom, that they might partake of the necessities of the body, which, taken moderately, would make them "discreet, sober, and undefiled." Even as the loaves in the wilderness and the waterpots in Cana were blessed, in order that they who received the spirit of life into their hearts and homes should neither hunger nor thirst.

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THE NIGHT

Moonlight spread along the vale of Widdecombe, putting all things to sleep, and the spirits of the wind were kind that night, withdrawing themselves, as if so ordered, that there might be peace for the lovers. Hardly a sound passed over the quivering moor as Sir Robert stepped forth, a long dark cloak, somewhat threadbare by day, covering his surplice, an office-book beneath his arm, a vessel containing holy water between his hands. Such a still night was rare in that tempestuous valley; there was no need of candlelight, for the moon served, a gracious light untroubled by gusts or noise of falling water. Moths flickered about the old priest, and around his white head stirred the fragrance from his garden; for he loved the flowers, and grew what he could, roses and honeysuckle, and sweet gillyflowers.

He stood a moment to gaze into the beautiful night, and half unconsciously he blessed it, lifting the holy water vessel, and with it making the sign of the cross upon the flowers and moonlight, murmuring, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost bless you, fragrant flowers, bless you, pale moon." His was a life of blessing, a life wedded to benediction, and somehow it was not a failure.

He passed along the road, and came at last to the new home. The door was open ready to receive him, and a faint light within guided him to the foot of the narrow stairs. Bowing his head, he bestowed upon the little stone-built cot the Peace,

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then ascended, and entered the marriage chamber, not as a man, but as a priest.

Anthonie and Petronel were waiting, and when he appeared they knelt. It was all very simple; the floor covered with crisp brown fern, no ceiling, only the oak beams and thatch of reeds above, no fire-place, the window was made of lattice-work; but one of the walls was hung with painted cloth, a rich and unusual possession for a small country home. Against that wall appeared the bed, severely plain, a completely furnished bed being accounted a luxury; rough sheets, hard pillows, and coverlet, nothing more, for night-robes were unknown. Beneath the window an oak chest containing the household linen; one chair, a wooden stool, a rough table bearing a cross, two candlesticks, and a wealth of flowers to make an altar, without which this civilised home would have ranked with the huts of the wild savages upon the moor. Two candles, which had been blessed, were lighted ready for the ceremony. It was a pure chamber, fresh with the presence of youth, sweet with the breath of flowers, consecrated by love, and made holy by the presence of the priest.

"The Lord be with you," said Sir Robert softly.

"And with Thy spirit," they answered him.

The priest lifted his hand, and with the power of his enchantments drove away from that chamber all evil spirits and the powers of darkness, saying:

"Bless, O Lord, this chamber and all that dwell therein, that they may be established in Thy peace and stand fast in Thy will, and live and grow in Thy love, and let the length of their days be multiplied."

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The bride and the bridegroom knelt beside the bed. Sir Robert moved towards them, and putting out his hands, committed the bed to the mercy and protection of the Giver of life, signing and sanctifying it, using these words:

"Bless, O Lord, this couch, Thou Who neither slumberest nor sleepest; Thou Who keepest Israel, keep Thy servants who rest in this bed from all phantoms and illusions of devils; keep them waking, that they may meditate on Thy precepts; keep them sleeping, that in their slumber they may have a sense of Thee; and let them here and everywhere be defended by the aid of Thy protection."

And then Anthonie and Petronel turned towards their loving old father; and he, with tears in his eyes, gave them the last of those abundant blessings.

"God bless your bodies and your souls, my children, and send a blessing upon you as He blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

"The hand of the Lord be upon you, dear children, and let Him send His holy angel to keep and comfort you all the days of your life.

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost bless you, dearly beloved children, Trine in number, One in Name."

And then he sprinkled them with holy water three times, and departed into the moonlit night, his gentle eyes still wet; and so to his home to pray again for all those who loved one another, for all those who feared God, and especially for those whom he had joined together that bright June day in Holy Matrimony.

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